THE MAGAZINE OF

Fantasy and Science Fiction

THE WIND BLOWS FREE

a novelet

by CHAD OLIVER

35¢ • JULY

S R a short story

by Charles Van Doren

C. M. Kornbluth

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THE MAGAZINE OF

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There are few more stirringly imaginative themes in science fiction than that of the generations-ship—the spaceship whereby man may cross the light-years separating us from the stars, even at speeds much less than that of light, creating a self-sufficient microcosm in which the great-great- . . . -great-grandchildren of the original voyagers may at last make planet-fall. So great a theme is never exhausted, even after an all-but-definitive treatment by Heinlein. Here Chad Oliver considers, not the technological wonders of the concept, but its impact upon the character of one man named Sam—the effect upon him of life in the Ship and, in turn, his effect upon the Ship's very existence.

The Wind Blows Free

by CHAD OLIVER

HAVE YOU EVER HEARD, WITH YOUR ears or with your soul, the far wind that stirs the world? Have you ever felt the deep beat of the sea, the sea that is the heart of the Earth?

Samuel Kingsley had never known these things.

That may have been his trouble.

Samuel Kingsley was born with a fever in his bones and a fire in his blood. As a baby, he was difficult. His parents had to work to keep their initial joy from changing into impatient anger. Sam screamed his head off, he fought his food, he clawed at his bed. He seldom smiled, and he was not affectionate.

He was bright enough, of course, or he would have been destroyed.

His childhood was little better, a stubborn series of scrapes and bruises and general mayhem. Sam was big for his age, and strong. He walked his own path and fought discipline like a wild stallion. He had no friends.

Sam was, in short, a maverick. He was unbranded. He should never have happened where he did, and when he did. But he was there, emphatically there, like a burr in the hide of a long-complacent animal.

He got into his first serious trouble when he was sixteen.

It was the day of his first big dance. He had to get dressed up in his best synthetic blue suit, which he detested, and the whole thing was

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very formal and proper, despite the fact that there were only twelve boys and girls of eligible age. The girls were poised and full of giggles, and the boys were shy, big-footed and gawky.

Sam liked the girls fine, but dancing bored him stiff.

And he wasn't shy.

When he was discovered to be absent from the dance, and it was noticed that a girl named Susan Merrill was also missing, the police were called. They found the two youngsters in one of the dark forbidden corridors. Susan, a blonde of pleasant proportions for her age, was unhurt but hysterical. Sam was defiant.

He knew that he had broken not one law but two. The black tunnels, those mysterious caves that burrowed into the hidden recesses of the Ship, were taboo except to older crewmen. And it was unheard-of for a boy and a girl to be alone together before they were married.

Sam didn't care. He had acted on impulse and had no regrets.

Because he was so young, and because the Council still did not know quite what to make of him, Sam got off the hook with a very light sentence. He was confined to his house for a solid year, and denied all privileges. His parents made it as rough on him as they could, but he was used to that.

He did his lessons contemptuously. When he could sneak out at night, he did so. The lights were low at night, and he could prowl the black caves all the way to the locked doors that sealed the people from the rest of the Ship. If he was unable to get out of the house, he read books he had stolen. Like most boys, he liked best the ones he was not supposed to read.

Sam liked sex in his books, because he was healthy and had a normal curiosity. And something in him responded to stories of rebels, to tales of men who struck out on their own. He dreamed of clipper ships, their sails taut against the wind. He dreamed of setting out into a green wilderness, with only a gun for company.

There were no seas on the Ship.

There was no wilderness.

And he had been taught that guns were evil. Not as evil, perhaps, as that greater evil no one talked about, but evil nonetheless.

At night, lying in his bed, he would slam his big fist into the plastic of his wall in an agony of frustration and bitterness, slam it until the blood smeared his knuckles and he could taste it in his mouth.

He knew tears, and the terrible loneliness of a boy who was out of step. No one ever heard him sobbing into the coldness and the silence of the long nights, and no one would have understood.

By his eighteenth year, Sam had grown big and raw-boned. Even his size was against him. He stood a rangy six-foot-four, and weighed better than two hundred pounds. His

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hair was black and untidy, and his eyes were dark. He was not a handsome man, but he had a strength in him, a power you could feel.

Sam was marked by his body. At eighteen, he was by far the biggest man on the Ship. He stood out like a pine in a forest of ferns, and he accentuated the difference by walking proudly erect, with his head thrown back.

He was a solitary animal, and therefore suspect. He was lonely, a man born out of his time, but he made no advances to others.

Since he was eighteen, and legally an adult, he had to take part in the annual observance of Heritage Day, on the eighth of February.

Bob Thomas came to get him.

Bob was the natural leader of his age-group. He was a pleasant-looking boy, with an easy manner and an unforced politeness that endeared him to his elders. He was the sort that accepted life as he found it, growing up to embody the ideals and traditions of his culture. He would have done well in Greece, or in Rome, or in England in her days of glory. He did well on the Ship. In time, he would make the Control Room. It was as inevitable for him as breathing.

"Ready for the big deal, Sam?"

"Sure."

"We'll pick up the others and get on down to the Show, okay? I think we ought to be a little early; shows the big boys we're on the ball."

"OK, Bob." Sam found it impossible to dislike Bob, although hate came easily to him. Bob was independent enough to be a man in his right, but he kept his independence within approved bounds. He even had a sense of humor. And Bob was big enough to put up a scrap. Sam respected strength as he respected few other things. He and Bob had fought it out once, and Sam had been hard pressed to win. Much to his surprise, Bob had not reported him, and had even lied about the bruises on his face.

As a matter of fact, Bob was the closest thing to a friend he had ever had. There had been a few girls, but that was different.

They walked down the street, actually a sort of catwalk, past the rows of identical cabins that people called houses. Their footsteps echoed hollowly in the great chamber. Above and below them, huge metal girders spanned the belly of the Ship. The slope of the Ship's gray walls was their heaven and their earth, as though they lived inside a vast bowl. Branching off from the main street, smaller catwalks led to dark passages—corridors to the Control Room, to the engine room, the hydroponics chamber. Some of them even went Outside, or so it was rumored. Only the specially selected members of the Crew could use *any* of these passages; there were others that were taboo to all. And there were legends, myths, about things that lived in some of those black caves. . . .

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The Show was in the central square. It was a perfectly ordinary tri-di theater, and today it was even more solemn than usual. Men in full-dress uniforms stood in a double column through which they had to march. The priest blessed them before they took their seats. Patriotic music flowed from the speakers.

It was all fairly impressive, Sam supposed, but he was not moved. Of course, this was the first time he had been permitted inside the Show on Heritage Day, but he expected nothing more than a mild anticlimax. After all, it was no secret what went on in there. He had had it drummed into him as far back as he could remember.

Still, it ought to be more interesting than the usual pallid fare.

He took his seat in the front row with the others of his age-group. Bob had the aisle seat, of course, and Sam found himself next to Susan Merrill. He grinned at her broadly and she flushed and kept her eyes on the screen.

There were blessings and speeches galore. Even old Captain Fondren made a speech, and the new Navigator was presented to much applause.

Sam endured it all.

Then the lights dimmed and the screen glowed.

The character of the music changed sharply. It was grim, threatening, with an insistent beat that thumped you in the chest.

Sam was suddenly conscious that he was *very* close to the screen.

In spite of himself, he tensed, waiting.

The palms of his hands began to sweat.

It started with a vicious abruptness, slamming him back into his seat.

Sound that was more than sound, sound that tore at you with a solid physical impact. Light that was more than light, light that seared your eyeballs with a flash that mocked the sun.

Sam screamed with the rest, and his voice was less than nothing. He closed his eyes, and the brilliance hammered through his eyelids. He trembled violently. He had no mind, no spirit, no personality. He wasn't Sam Kingsley, he wasn't anybody. He was just a spot of horror in a maelstrom of violence, trying to hang on, trying to ride it out.

The ripping, screeching roar ceased.

The dead silence flowed in with a shock of its own.

Sam opened his eyes. At first, he couldn't see. There was only a voice, speaking into the emptiness.

The voice said: *This is Earth. This was your planet. Look at it now.*

Sam looked, his heart thudding like a wild thing in his chest.

He saw desolation, and death, and worse than death. He saw great cities gutted, their buildings shattered, their streets ripped like tissue paper. Black windows stared at him with

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cold stone eyes. A few figures that might have been human stumbled through the ruins, clawing at their faces, their shredded clothes, their blistered bodies.

He saw a land that had been green, and was green no more. A sere, scorched desert where nothing lived, where the very idea of life was blasphemy. No trees, no water, no crops.

Nothing.

A red sun glared in a murky sky.

He saw people. He saw men, women, and children: all dead or dying. A man, his naked body swollen with blisters, leaping into a swimming pool, holding himself under, gulping at the water like a fish from a nightmare sea. A blind woman sitting in what had once been an automobile, trying to feed a baby that could no longer move.

Sam could not watch it all. He was sick and dizzy. He could not think.

The voice was still speaking: *This is what a war did to your world. This is what hydrogen bombs and cobalt bombs and germ bombs did to your world. This is what people like you did to their own world when they couldn't grow up in time.*

There was more.

There was enough so that it rammed its message into your insides. No man could sit through this and ever forget it. Sam felt himself scaled down to size, and he discovered that there were bigger things than Sam Kingsley in the universe. This is not a finding that any young man makes with pleasure, and it was doubly difficult for Sam.

But you cannot argue with obliteration.

The voice said: *These are the other planets that make up your solar system. These are the worlds we explored before the end came. These are the worlds we could reach.*

Sam knew of these worlds, knew them from the history books. But he saw them now as though for the first time, saw them through a mist of despair.

The wind-whipped seas of sand that were Mars.

The violet desolation that was Venus.

The frozen forbidding hell that was Saturn.

All of them.

Hopeless.

There was nowhere in our solar system that could shelter us. Our own world was dying. We did what we could.

We built the Ships.

The Ships filled the screen, immense towers of metal, standing like colossal silver tombstones in the graveyard of the world. Of course, most of them had been built long before the last poisoning of the Earth. They had been designed for man's greatest adventure, the exploration of the stars. They were not fundamentally different from the spaceships that had touched down on the planets of the solar system. Unhappily, no faster-than-light drive

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had been invented, in the nick of time or otherwise, and although men were working on the secrets of prolonged suspended animation, this had not as yet proved practical.

In any event, the problem was academic.

The Ships *had* to go.

They were planned to be entirely self-sufficient. Green plants in great hydroponic tanks provided the air, synthetic foods nourished in chemical vats supplied the means of support, and an entire Ship formed a balanced ecological system that would maintain life for generations —provided the population remained stable.

To Sam, it was a strange thing indeed to see a Ship from the *outside*. The Ship had always been a curved horizon of gray metal walls, a tangle of catwalks, a cluster of houses and tanks and sealed corridors that were dark caves of mystery. From the outside, it was a thing of beauty, but not the home he had always known.

Where sunlight and air and rolling land surrounded the Ship on the screen, there was now only the star-dusted infinity of space, an emptiness more hostile to life than the polluted world the Ship had left behind. Sam had never seen that dark sea he sailed, but he had grown up with the ever-present knowledge of its existence. For the people of the Ship, the Outside was death itself. At night, when the lights were low, you would lie in your bed and feel that strangest of seas lapping at the walls of your room, those icy waves seeping into your head and your nerves and your blood. . . .

The voice said: *You are all the passengers on a Ship. You who hear my voice may be the only human beings left; each Ship follows a different course. It may take centuries before you reach a world you can live on, circling a sun I cannot even imagine. You may never find it. But remember your Heritage! Remember that you are men, and remember what happened to men on Earth! You must begin again, you children of Earth. And you must be careful, you must be wise. If ever you find hate in your hearts, remember, remember . . .*

And it happened again.

The light that was beyond light, the blasting roar that was a crazed river of sound. The twisted cities, the poisoned air, the shrieks of the ruined and the maimed . . .

The screen darkened.

The lights in the Show came on again.

There was a terrible silence, for what was there to say? Sam kept his eyes straight ahead, afraid somehow to look around him.

Captain Fondren walked up to the stage, his body bent with years, his hair gray and lifeless.

"This is your Heritage," he said slowly, speaking the ancient ritual. "We all have a sacred trust to preserve what we can. All who hear my voice are adults, members of the

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people. You will conduct yourselves accordingly throughout your lives. We dare not fail. It is my duty to inform you that this Ship has now been in space for three hundred and ninety-seven years. I ask you to join me in prayer."

He paused, his old eyes looking far beyond the Ship.

"The Lord is my shepherd . . ."

The ancient words filled the chamber. It was one of those rare moments when mumbled phrases and familiar rituals suddenly become charged with meaning. The words were strong words, but Sam could hardly hear them.

Three hundred and ninety-seven years, he thought. *Three hundred and ninety-seven years.*

If they had not found what they sought in all that time, they would never find it.

The voyage would never end.

The Ship was all there was.

Sam was impressed by Heritage Day, impressed and scared. For the first time in his life, he began to understand the Ship and the people who lived in it.

His people were a frightened people, a refugee people. They were conservative and cautious because they were trying to survive. They were existing in a kind of cultural suspended animation, just hanging on between disaster and a new beginning.

The words of his parents meant a little more now.

"Sam, Sam, why can't you be like the other little boys? Why do you always want to be getting into trouble? Now, do your homework and we'll have a nice synthesteak for you when you're through." That was Mom, a colorless, shapeless woman, going through the motions of life without ever really living.

And Dad, a big man like Sam, somehow tragic, somehow defeated before he had ever gone into battle. *"You can't change the world, son. The rules are there for a reason. You've got to do your part, son, whether you like it or not."*

Sam tried.

He told himself that he had been a fool. He was to live in the Ship, and he had only one life to live. Who was he to think he was better than other people?

He was assigned work in the main hydroponics chamber, and he learned his job dutifully. He forced himself to be interested in the growing plants and in the chemical sea in which they grew. He regulated the sun lamps and adjusted the chemical flows with precision. He grew to like the fresh air of the chamber and looked forward to going to work every morning. At least, the hydroponics chamber was green, it was alive. The dead air piped in from the rest of the Ship depressed him, and going home at night was not pleasant.

And yet, Sam was not happy. He tried to be like the others, but he found no magic switch that would

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shut off his mind. If only the air would *move* more, if only it would flow in something different from its orderly, measured channels! If only the wind would blow, if only he could have clouds and storms and rivers of rain!

Sam still dreamed at night, and that was fatal.

He did not marry, and that added to his discontent. There were times when his body seethed as though with fever, times when the thoughts of women were like a sickness in his stomach. He tried to fall into what the people called love, but he could not. He would try one girl and then another, and each time something within him would rebel.

"Sam, try to be nice like the others. . . ."

"Sam, you mustn't say such things, they're wicked. . . ."

"Sam, you're so silly. . . ."

For five years, Sam worked in the hydroponics chamber at the same job. He did it well. He did it better than it had ever been done before.

But he was not promoted.

No one ever sounded him out about joining the Crew, not even Bob.

The other men of his own age moved on up the scale. Every one of them was a member of the Crew. Sam stayed in the hydroponics chamber, and after five years he knew he was stuck there for life. The Council didn't trust him, would never trust him. His crime was that he was different, and on the Ship that was the worst crime of all.

One evening, when he was working late with the plants, he looked up to see Ralph Holbrook watching him. Ralph was the same age as Sam; they had gone through the ceremony of Heritage Day together. Ralph had been a timid boy, but he was cocky now in his new uniform.

He was also a little drunk.

"Still at it, eh Sam?"

"Looks that way."

"Like your work?"

"Can't complain."

"You'd *better* like it, Sam boy."

Sam turned and faced him. "Meaning?"

"You know what I mean! You used to think you were really something, didn't you? Picking on everybody, swaggering around like you owned the Ship. Where are you now, Sam boy? Where are you now?"

Sam felt the old anger surging up within him. He clenched his big fists, bowed his neck. His eyes narrowed. "Take it easy, Ralph. I don't want to hurt you."

Ralph laughed. "Still think you're tough, Sam boy? Still think you can be a big man with your fists? Come on, Sam! Try something!"

Sam took a step forward, his heart pounding. He could beat Ralph to a pulp, and he knew it.

But he stopped.

Striking a member of the Crew?

He didn't dare.

"Run along, Ralph," he said quietly. "Mommy's probably waiting up for you."

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Ralph Holbrook stepped in and slapped his face with the palm of his hand.

Sam didn't move.

Ralph laughed again, turned, and walked proudly out of the chamber.

Sam's face was expressionless.

He turned back to his work, did what he had to do, and left the hydroponics room. The dead air clogged his nostrils as he walked.

There was no outward sign that anything had changed. He was just the same Sam Kingsley, big and awkward and alone, walking home from work, his footsteps trailing him with empty echoes.

But Sam had been pushed over the threshold.

He had not made the decision; it had been made for him.

The gray hopeless monotony of his life had been nibbling away at him for a long time. The future stretched away before him like a featureless plain, without life, without color, without purpose.

He was caught in an alien world, trapped in a Ship in the deeps of space. There was nothing in that orderly world for him, nothing but an existence that was less than life.

Very well.

He had tried to live by their rules, and had failed.

From now on, he would make his own rules.

His step quickened, he was more alert than he had been in years. All his life he had been fascinated by those dark tunnels that burrowed away into the depths of the Ship. Those forbidden caves were the only frontiers he had. High officers of the Crew were the only people who were ever permitted in most of them, and it was clear by now that Sam would never be a member of the Crew.

He had no real plan. He simply knew that he had to do something, and there was only one place to start.

He ate a hearty meal and took a nap.

For once, his sleep was untroubled.

He woke up four hours later, stuffed his pockets with food, and tested his tubelight. He slipped out of the house into the gloom of the sleeping Ship.

His feet were sure beneath him, and there was nothing clumsy about him now. Like a shadow, he moved across a little-used catwalk that spanned the black belly of the Ship.

A dark tunnel loomed before him.

A faintly glowing sign said: AUTHORIZED PERSONNEL ONLY.

Sam smiled and stepped into the cave of night.

He took off his shoes, careful to make no sounds that might be overheard. It was pitch dark in the corridor, but he was afraid to use his tubelight yet. Looking back over his shoulder, he could see the tunnel entrance framed by the Ship's night lights.

He moved along as fast as he

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dared, the fingers of his left hand lightly touching the wall to guide him. The passage seemed straight as a needle, and progress was not difficult. Nevertheless, he felt a nervousness he couldn't shake off. From his earliest childhood, he had been told never to go into one of those corridors, told of horrible things that lurked there, waiting.

He fancied that he was old enough now to discount such nursery tales, but just the same—

Something cold hit him in the face.

Sam ducked, fell flat on the floor. He stifled a scream, then managed a feeble grin as he realized what had happened. He had run into a door. He risked the light, and in its pencil beam he saw that the door was an ordinary metal one, sealing off the passage. There was another sign on it: KEEP OUT.

Sam tried the door.

It was unlocked.

He swung it open, stepped through, and closed it again behind him. He blinked his eyes. This tunnel was larger, and the lights were still on. It had a well-used air about it. He hesitated, figuring out his position. If he turned left, he would wind up back at the town where the people lived. If he turned right, he would be moving toward the bow of the Ship, toward the Control Room.

Sam went right.

He almost ran along, his shoes dangling around his neck. He felt the cold sweat on his body, the anxious thudding of his heart. It was all so simple, so like a dream, hurrying down this silent passage, the Ship around him like a monstrous beast, waiting, waiting . . .

What would they do to him if they caught him here? He tried not to think about it. He just kept going as fast as he could, his shoes bruising his chest, the tubelight gripped in his hand as though it were a weapon—

He rounded a turn, and stopped as though he had slammed into a wall. He held his breath, his lungs straining, the sweat dripping down his sides in icy streams.

There were two Crewmen in the corridor.

It was a moment frozen in time; it seemed to go on forever. The two men were seated at a small table, playing cards. One man was facing Sam, but his eyes were on the cards in his hand. Just beyond the table, there was a blaze of light from the open door of the Control Room.

Sam stood stock still. He was afraid to move, and afraid *not* to move. Almost involuntarily, he retreated back around the turn. He leaned against the wall, gasping with the effort to breathe silently.

Guards! Here, in the middle of the night. Why?

Had they seen him, caught just a flicker of movement? They would surely have spotted him if they had been alert, but why should they be alert? The Ship was run with the precision of a clock; people were

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never where they shouldn't be,

Still—

He tried to hold his breath, tried to listen.

Voices.

They *had* seen him!

"You're just jumpy. I didn't hear anything."

"I tell you, there was something there."

"You just don't like your hand." Laughter. "Did it have two heads, or three?"

"OK, OK. Maybe I'm crazy. But I'm going to have a look."

A chair scraped across a metallic floor.

Run!

Sam sprinted down the tunnel, heedless of the noise, as fast as he could go. The passage was hideously straight, there was no place to hide. He damned himself for a fool, but it was too late now. If he could just find a pool of shadow, a curve in the corridor, anything—

"Hey!"

They had seen him.

Sam redoubled his efforts. He determined not to panic. He mustn't let himself go, he had to think . . .

The guards couldn't have recognized him, not at that distance. He could outrun them, he was certain of that. If he could get back to that branching passage, he could slip into the sleeping town and nobody would ever be the wiser.

He tossed a glance back over his shoulder, and his heart sank at what he saw. The guards had stopped, and were using a wall phone to call ahead.

Sam slowed his pace, fighting for breath. There was just one question he had to answer: could he reach that cutoff tunnel before the Crewmen from town got there from the other end? He wanted to think that he could, but he had to admit that the odds were against it. He still had too far to go. And even if he did, the others were not fools. They would know about that cutoff, would be waiting at the other end.

No, that was out.

There was only one thing to do, and he did it.

The next door he came to, he stopped. He fumbled open the catch, swung the door open, and slipped inside. At first, he was blind; there was no light at all. He switched on his tubelight, closed the door, and bolted it shut.

He made himself take the time to put on his shoes. His lungs ached in his chest, and the air in the passage was stale and dead. He held the light in front of him, and tried to run. He soon slowed to a fast walk.

He listened carefully, but heard no sounds of pursuit.

The corridor was different from the others. It seemed *older* somehow, and he had the eerie feeling that no man had walked these floors for centuries. There were oil slicks on the walls, and the floor was gritty.

Sam kept going.

He came to another door that

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sealed off the passage. There was a sign on it, but it was streaked and dirty; he couldn't read it. He fumbled the catch open, shoved on the door.

It didn't open.

Sam bit his lip. He backed off, took a deep breath, and threw his shoulder into the door. It gave a little. He hit it again, and yet again. It swung open with a rasping screech. He squeezed through and shut it again behind him. The bolt stuck and he couldn't throw it.

He flashed the light around. The corridor was smaller now; his head almost scraped the ceiling. The air was so flat he could hardly breathe it. There was a layer of fine, white dust on the floor. When he took a step, the stuff puffed up in a cloud, stinging his eyes and his nostrils.

Sam hesitated, doubting himself. He could still go back. It would be rough, but they probably wouldn't kill him. A little conditioning in the surgery, that was all, and he would be the most placid man on the Ship. He shuddered.

There was a chance, just a chance, that this tunnel might eventually take him back to the town, back to some forgotten entrance. He still had perhaps five hours before morning, and he would not be missed until then.

He smiled sourly. He had only intended to do a little exploring this first night; he had fully expected to be back at work tomorrow. Now he was trapped, cut off, and he would probably never be able to go back to the life he had known.

Well, it was a small loss.

Sam took a bar of food out of his pocket and wolfed it down. He felt a little better, but he was desperately thirsty. If there were ever a next time, he would bring water and forget about the food.

Of course, there wasn't going to *be* any next time.

Not for him.

He steadied himself and flashed the light around again. There was nothing to see. The black cave stretched away as far as the light could penetrate. The fine dust on the floor was white, like the snow he had seen in pictures.

There was just one way to go.

Sam moved forward at a fast walk, the dust puffing up around him until he could hardly see. He moved on, his mind frozen hard against the terror that seeped in around him, walking down a silent tunnel to nowhere.

He kept it up for two hours, and then he couldn't take it any longer. The clouds of dust hung in the stale air like smoke, and his throat was raw and burning.

He had seen nothing.

He had heard nothing, save for the *pad-pad-pad* of his own feet.

The tunnel had twisted and curved until he didn't have the faintest idea where he was. There had been other corridors branching off from the one he was in, but he had

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been afraid to try them. This way, he could at least retrace his steps if he had to. He had a childish, irrational fear of getting lost, even though he now had no home to go back to.

But he *had* to get out of the dust.

He came to a door in the wall and forced it open. He went through and closed it quickly behind him. He stood very still, trying not to stir up the dust.

He flashed the light around him.

For one awful moment, he thought all the stories he had heard about *things* that lived in the forbidden caves were true. He was in a room, not a tunnel, and the walls were lined with grotesque figures—big bulging caricatures of men, with glassy faces and swollen arms and legs.

But the things were not alive.

They had never been alive.

Gingerly, Sam stepped over and touched one. It was made of some kind of smooth stuff that reminded him of pottery, and it glistened dully in the light.

How long had it been since this lost chamber had seen a light? A hundred years? Two hundred? Three?

He tapped the thing with his fingernail. It gave off only a faint click, although he knew that it was hollow. He looked around him, estimating rapidly. There must have been at least fifty of the weird figures in the chamber with him.

He knew what they were, and it came as something of a shock when he realized that he had never actually *seen* one of them before.

Spacesuits.

He was in a storeroom full of spacesuits.

Strange, half-formed thoughts began to well up in his mind. He hardly knew what to make of them, and for a moment he feared he might be going mad. *Funny I've never seen a spacesuit before. Funny none of us were given training in their use. Funny no one has ever had to go Outside for repairs.*

Or were they a carefully guarded secret, one of the privileges of the Crew?

But what was all this secrecy *for,* anyhow?

The puzzle of the midnight guards at the Control Room door came back to plague him. Sure, it wouldn't do to have women and kids and questionable characters like himself swarming over the place, getting in the way. But guards in the middle of the night seemed a bit excessive.

What were they hiding in the Control Room?

What was there they did not dare let anyone see until they knew they could trust him absolutely?

In fact, now that he thought about it, there was one question that might be asked about a lot of things on the Ship.

It was a deadly question, a question that had toppled empires.

Why?

The unvoiced word vibrated

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against his brain, and there was no answer to it.

He looked more closely at the spacesuit in front of him. The thing had a thin film of dust on it. He heaved on it, turned it around. There were two oxygen tanks clamped to its back. He found the switch that activated the air supply and threw it.

Nothing happened.

He picked up the heavy helmet, pressed it to his ear. He heard nothing. He sniffed at it, and the air was as dead as ever. There was no oxygen coming through.

Surely, in a ship in space, it would only be common sense to keep the spacesuits ready for action. He shook his head. Of course, there must be others somewhere, but still—

He replaced the helmet and chewed on another food bar. He hated to go back into the dust-laden corridor, but he couldn't stay here. He only had a few hours left before the working day began.

A plan?

He had no plan. He thought vaguely that there might be a lifeboat of some sort on the Ship, but it would be a pure accident if he found it. Even if he did locate it, it would do him no good. He had had no training in operating a ship in space, and he knew enough about spaceships to be certain that he couldn't just pile into one and go blasting merrily on his way.

In any event, where could he go?

One notion did occur to him. Unless there were no rhyme or reason at all to the plan to the Ship, there must have been a purpose in locating the storeroom where it was.

And there was just one such purpose that he could think of.

He opened the door again, coughing as the dust hit him. He listened carefully, but the corridor was utterly silent. It stretched on before him, a dead and lifeless thing, heavy with the weight of centuries.

Sam moved on, trying not to give way to despair.

Pad-pad-pad.

The fine white dust swirled and eddied in the old, stale air.

The pencil of light stabbed through the gloom, becoming a solid bar of silver radiance as it knifed through the glittering clouds of dust.

His throat was so dry he could no longer swallow, and he thought of the clean, fresh air of the hydroponics room with hopeless longing.

Pad-pad-pad.

His shoes kicked something on the floor, and he looked down. There was a heap of something there, white as the dust that covered it.

Bones.

Bones, and a shrunken skin as dry as old paper. A human skull gaped at him with something that had once been eyes. He knelt and touched the thing. The skin crumbled at the slightest pressure.

Sam looked at the pitiful remnants that had long ago walked and breathed and loved. He felt no horror, only an odd surge of sym-

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pathy and relief. He was not the first, after all! He was not the only man who had gotten out of line.

How many others had there been?

He waved a friendly greeting at the pile of bones.

I wish I could have known you, he thought. *We might have done something, together. I might have had someone to talk to. We could have been friends, you and I.*

He stepped over the bones, being careful not to disturb them, and walked on.

Within half an hour, he came to the end of the tunnel.

A door sealed the passage before him, but this was no ordinary door. This was a massive metal thing set into the very side of the Ship itself.

A faded sign read: DANGER. LOCK FOUR. DANGER.

Sam stared at the gleaming metal. Involuntarily, he backed away. He had come to the end of his world. Beyond that door, he knew, was the chamber of an airlock. And on the other side of the airlock—

Outside.

Deep space.

The End.

Sam sat down in the dust, his head in his hands. He didn't try to kid himself. He was through. This was all there was. He had no choice now. He could only retrace his steps along that dead tunnel, go back and give himself up.

And then?

He shivered, and the blood ran cold in his veins.

No, no. I won't give up. I can't. Not yet.

He got to his feet, trembling.

He forced himself to walk up to the airlock door. He reached out and touched it. It felt icy, or was that just his imagination?

He wasn't thinking; he was beyond that. He only knew that the Ship and everything in it had become horrible to him, unbearable. Maybe there was a workable spacesuit inside the lock, maybe he could go Outside and drift forever among the stars. . . .

It would be a cleaner death than the thing that waited for him at the other end of the tunnel.

He reached out and gripped the wheel in the middle of the lock.

He wrenched it, hard.

It stuck at first, then began to turn.

Instantly, the corridor exploded into sound.

A siren screamed, rising and falling, screeching through the Ship.

The noise deafened him after the hours of silence. He covered his ears and the siren wailed in his brain.

Oh God, they've got it wired. They know where I am. They'll come after me, kill me—

Sam didn't want to die. Opening the inner door of the airlock had been a gesture, nothing more. Faced with the reality of death, he had only one instinctive thought:

Hide!

Get away!

He ran back into the tunnel.

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He ran blindly, bruising himself against the walls, a mindless body fleeing through a nightmare cave of arid white clouds and the insistent fury of the siren's scream.

With numbing abruptness, Sam Kingsley heard a human voice.

Human?

It was screeching so that he could hardly tell, screeching a single mad high-pitched note over and over again. How could he hear it over the wail of the siren? He shook his head wildly, like an animal.

The siren had stopped.

He stuffed his big fist into his own mouth, biting down on the knuckles. The screaming voice that might have been human turned into a strangled gurgle.

It was his own voice.

He sobbed, and the sound was shatteringly loud in the sudden silence. His ears were ringing, his body was wet with sweat. The dust in his lungs made him cough, but he didn't have enough air to cough. . . .

He stumbled over the skeleton in the corridor, scattering the bones. He tried to keep running, but he was staggering now.

Hide!

Get away!

If he could just reach that storeroom, get in there with the spacesuits, there might be a chance, a prayer—

No.

It was too late.

He heard voices ahead of him in the corridor, brushing noises, the tread of feet.

"Kingsley!" The shout was strangely muffled. "Kingsley! We know you're in there! Stay where you are. Don't try to fight. We won't hurt you. Kingsley! Can you hear me?"

Sam collapsed on the floor, his face in the dust, gasping for breath. He didn't answer, he *couldn't* answer. He stayed there in a huddle, unable to think, beyond even despair, the blood roaring in his ears.

The lights in the ancient tunnel came on, blinding him, searing whitely into his brain.

The footsteps came closer, closer. . . .

There. He saw a shoe, right in front of his eyes.

Voices. "Is he dead?" "No such luck." "He's too tough to kill."

A foot nudged his battered shoulder, none too gently.

"Come on, Sam boy. Get up."

It was like awakening after a too-long sleep. He had to swim back toward awareness, pulling his way through dense layers of stifling fog. Every bone in his body hurt. He rolled over very slowly.

He struggled to his knees.

The foot hit him again. It wasn't a hard kick, but it didn't have to be. Sam went down, his mouth in the dust.

"Come on, Sam boy. Stop playing around."

"That's enough of that, Ralph. Let him alone."

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Sam tried it again. He got to his knees, waited. Nothing happened. He pulled himself erect. His vision cleared.

There were three of them in the corridor with him. They were all Crewmen, and they all had face masks on to protect them from the dust. He recognized Ralph Holbrook by his voice. The men all had canteens clipped to their belts.

"Water," he said. His voice was a dry croak.

The men were ghostly in the white light. One of them shook his head. "No water, Kingsley. Not until we get you back where you belong. After that, you can have all the water you want."

"Water," he said again. His throat was on fire.

"Sorry, Sam boy."

Holbrook moved a little. Sam could hear the water gurgling in his canteen.

"Let's go, Kingsley," said the man who had spoken before. He sounded almost bored. "It's a long walk back."

Sam stared at the canteen on Holbrook's belt with raw, red eyes. He stood absolutely motionless, and then something snapped inside him. It was like a dam bursting, a dam he had held in check all his life. His eyes brightened, and a terrible icy strength flowed into his exhausted body.

He stood up straight, his head almost touching the roof of the tunnel. His huge frame seemed to swell until he filled the corridor. His hair was white with dust, but his eyes were black coals in the light. He clenched his bleeding fists and his lips drew back from his teeth.

Suddenly, he was very calm, very sure.

He stood there like a rock.

He was through running.

And then, for the first time in his life, Sam Kingsley really got mad.

He took one quick step forward and caught Holbrook's tunic in his fist. Holbrook's eyes widened and a curious noise came out of his mouth. Sam yanked, and the fabric ripped.

Off balance, Holbrook started to fall on his face.

Sam brought his beefy right fist up from his knees and sent it crunching into Holbrook's jaw. Something broke; the jaw went flabby. Quite coldly, Sam drove a piston left into Holbrook's stomach, and then caught him with another right to the side of the head as the man crumpled at his feet.

Silently, he went after the others.

The corridor was so narrow that the two Crewmen got in each other's way. With icy deliberation, Sam held them off with a jabbing left hand, throwing his right with merciless precision.

The first man kicked at him frantically. Sam caught the foot, twisted it with a wrenching jolt. The man screamed. Sam picked him up by the feet and smacked his head against the tunnel wall.

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The last Crewman turned to run.

Sam reached out his long left arm, caught his shoulder, spun him around. The man slashed out with something that glittered and Sam felt a hot wetness in his chest. He narrowed his black eyes, slammed his right into the man's face with all his strength. He followed it up relentlessly, slugging the man back down the corridor. The man fell, staggered to his feet again.

Sam let him have it.

It was all over.

Sam felt a small warm glow of satisfaction deep within himself, and that was all. He stood quietly for a moment, gasping for breath in the dust-choked air, and then he reached down and unhooked the man's canteen. He lifted it to his lips and poured cold water down his throat.

That was a mistake.

When he was through being sick, he got Holbrook's canteen and forced himself to sip the water slowly, letting it trickle down until nausea made him stop. Then he found one of the face masks that was still relatively intact and pulled it over his face.

Air!

Clean, filtered air!

He breathed deeply, luxuriating in the stuff. He filled his lungs with it, tasting it, loving it. His chest worked like a bellows until the oxygen made him dizzy and he had to slow down.

He examined his chest. It was slippery with blood, blood furred now with sticky dust, but it was not a deep cut. In any event, he wasn't worried about it. There was no time left for worry.

Sam knew that he had killed the man he had slammed against the corridor wall. He knew it without looking, and he felt no remorse. It was simply another item to be added to the list, and it made his position more serious than ever. It made his position completely hopeless.

He laughed, shortly.

The hell with it, gentlemen! I'll cheat you yet!

There was no point in trying to reach the storeroom. It might gain him an hour or two, nothing more. And they would be after him very soon now, many of them, far more than he could ever handle.

There was just one thing left to do.

Sam turned, picked his way over the prone bodies, and went back the way he had come. It was easier with the lights on, easier with decent air in his lungs, easier now that he wasn't burning up with thirst. But as he walked the reaction caught up with him, the adrenalin of battle faded, and his legs wobbled precariously.

He almost made it before he fell down, and then he just crawled the rest of the way.

The faded sign was the same: DANGER. LOCK FOUR. DANGER.

The massive metal door still gleamed in the very side of the Ship. Beyond that airlock—

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Well, no matter. He was through, either way.

He pulled himself to his feet, grasped the wheel in the middle of the great door, twisted it.

The siren exploded into fury again, but this time he was ready for it. He ignored the bedlam, kept on turning the wheel. It came more easily now, loosening up, it was spinning—

There was a rasping creak he could hear above the siren's scream.

Sam's hand dropped from the cold metal wheel. In spite of himself, he backed away, holding his breath.

The airlock door opened with a hiss.

At that precise moment, he heard a chorus of cries that cut through the racket of the siren. A glance down the tunnel showed a troop of Crewmen advancing through the smoke-like dust.

Sam waved his hand at them tauntingly.

Without hesitation, he stepped through the airlock door. He found himself in a small metal chamber. Remembering the films he had seen, he jabbed a green button on a wall panel. The great door through which he had come hissed shut again, just before the others reached it.

That door could not be opened again from the Ship as long as he was inside the airlock.

He looked around him. There was little to see. The lock was a small one, perhaps ten feet square. It had been painted a dull gray, but the paint had peeled and cracked, showing the dark metal beneath.

The chamber was quite empty.

There was no providential spacesuit.

Sam stepped across to the circular portal at the far end of the airlock. He touched it with his finger. It felt cold. Just to the right of the portal there was another panel. The panel had a red button set into it.

Sam reached out to press the button.

His finger trembled so violently that he missed it altogether.

It was all very well to make up your mind to do something that went against your very soul. It was all very well to be convinced that you were going to do it. It was all very well to *try* to do it.

But beyond this last door was Outside.

Outside the Ship.

Outside the world.

Outside, past the sandy beaches of a warm and tiny island, out into the vastnesses of a desolate sea, cold and empty beyond belief. Out into space itself, out into a nightmare death that had haunted you from childhood. . . .

A hollow clanging filled the chamber.

The Crewmen were trying to batter the inner door down.

Sam took a deep breath, and held it. He pressed the red button. He felt a cool current against his body as air began to cycle.

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The circular portal creaked and hissed.

It began to open.

Sam closed his eyes, held his breath with maniac ferocity.

He counted to ten.

He squared his shoulders and walked forward. He walked through the port. He was Outside—

He began to fall.

God, can I have guessed right, why don't I explode, why can't I feel anything. . . .

He hit something with a numbing crash. The something gave under the impact; it was flexible. It ripped at his arms and legs as he fell—

Then it stopped.

It was over.

Sam couldn't hold his breath any longer. His lungs were bursting, his eyes bulging from their sockets. He opened his mouth, gasped, swallowed.

Air!

The face-mask could only filter air; there had to be air there in the first place. And that meant—

Sam opened his eyes.

Green.

Yellow.

Red.

Black.

Colors! A riot of colors! He had never seen such colors; they stunned his eyes. He looked up, past a tangle of green. Light! Bright, golden light.

A sun.

Sam reached up, ripped off his face-mask.

An avalanche of smells almost smothered him. It was like his hydroponics room, but magnified a million times. He smelled green growing things, flowers, trees—

Life.

He had been living in a dead world, a counterfeit world, and here was the real thing, dazzling, incredible, wonderful, overpowering. A gentle breeze ruffled the leaves over his head, a sweet living breeze he could taste in his mouth.

Sam tried his body gingerly. No bones were broken, as far as he could tell. He reached out and pulled the sticky green vines apart, making a hole. He began to inch along painfully, like a worm, sucking in the earth-moist air as he went. He forced his way through a tangled miracle of underbrush for some twenty long minutes, and then he found himself in a small clearing.

There was water in the clearing, a little spring bubbling up from an outcropping of glistening black rocks. Sam stared at it; it seemed to him that he had never seen anything so beautiful. Tiny brown rootlets trailed down into the pale water. There were clean white pebbles on the bottom, all worn and smooth. He could see the pebbles in exact detail, almost as though the water magnified them, but when he thrust his arm into the spring he could not reach bottom.

Sam cupped the cold water in his dirty hands and drank it. He had never tasted water so sweet, so charged with vitality.

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He stood up on shaking legs. He looked back the way he had come.

He saw a sight he would never forget.

There was the Ship, the mighty Ship, rearing its bulk toward an electric blue sky. There was the Ship, the world he had known, and it was a dead thing, a defeated thing.

Its once-bright sides were dull with rust and corrosion. Its once-powerful jets were buried in dirt and brambles. Its once-proud outline was blurred by the tangled green ropes of creepers and vines.

There was the Ship, there was his world: buried beneath the decay and the growth of centuries.

The Ship had landed; that was obvious enough. It had touched down long ago, generations ago. It had found the world it had sought, the world that might give his people another chance.

The great journey had ended hundreds of years ago.

And the passengers?

They had stayed in the Ship.

They had been afraid to come out.

They had built their little safe sterile society in their metal tube of a world, and they had been afraid to start again. They remembered what had happened on Earth; they were never allowed to forget. A lifetime of warnings buzzed through Sam's brain:

"You must be careful, you must be wise. . . ."

"Take no chances. . . ."

"Better to be safe than sorry. . . ."

Sam had known, somehow. A part of him had always known. *This* was the secret the Crewmen hid from their people. *This* was why the useless control room was guarded, even in the midnight hours. *This* was why the Crewmen had to be selected so carefully. *This* was why they had feared him, hated him, stifled him—

Sam felt the warm sun on his neck, tasted the living air in his mouth, smelled the breeze that had kissed the flowers and the trees and the blue vault of the skies.

And he threw back his head and laughed, laughed with the sheer blind exultation of being alive.

He flopped down on the ground by the bubbling spring, pillowed his head in his arms, and was asleep in seconds.

When Sam woke up, the world was dark around him—dark and yet shot with a luminous gray that told him that dawn was near. He had no idea how long he had slept, since he did not know the planet's period of rotation, but he felt rested and ready to go.

He was cold, and his body was stiff and sore. The ground that had seemed so warm in the sunlight was chill and damp now, and there were tiny beads of moisture on the grass stems. The stars were fading as light seeped over the horizon, but they still dusted the heavens with their glory.

He drank some more water, but

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it failed to fill the emptiness that gnawed inside him. He searched his pockets, but he had no food left. He stood there and shivered, half smiling at his own plight.

He didn't know how to build a fire.

He didn't know what berries or nuts were safe to eat.

He had no weapons.

He listened, almost holding his breath. He heard the world around him, the world he could not see. He heard sounds he had never heard on the Ship; the very air was filled with rustlings and sighings and a vague *thump* as something heavy moved in the brush.

Sam stood quietly, watching the sunrise. He felt as though he were just being born, coming forth as a man after an eternity of not-life inside a great metal egg. . . .

The sun came up slowly, taking its own sweet time, doing the job right. It bathed the world in soft pastels, in rose and soft yellow and rich brown. It warmed the ground, the leaves, the grasses. It rolled into the sky, almost timidly, and looked down on itself, smiling into the chuckles of the spring.

Sam looked again at the Ship. It was a sad thing in the sunlight, a tragic thing. It looked like the tombstone placed over the grave of a giant. It was hard to believe that people lived and loved and died within those metal walls; it was as if the ancient Egyptians of Earth had sealed their society inside a vast pyramid, trying to preserve it for the ages. . . .

Sam felt no anger now, not even triumph. The green world around him was too big for that. Instead, watching that rusting hulk being strangled in the patient coils of the vines, he felt the beginnings of compassion, of understanding.

I'll be back, he thought. *One day I'll be back.*

And then the irony of it welled up within him. *O my people! The door was always open to you, the door into sunlight and warmth and life. The door was always open, if you only had the courage to walk through it!*

He turned and set out toward a low range of bluish hills, still half hidden by mist. He was desperately hungry, with no way of getting food, but happiness was in him like a song. He *knew* he was on the threshold of a new life, he *knew* that more miracles waited for him beneath that alien, golden sun. He had only to keep going, to walk far enough and long enough—

He smelled the smoke first.

He was walking through a clump of tall, cool trees, relishing the spongy softness of the leaves on the forest floor. He caught a whiff of woodsmoke, heavy and pungent with the tang of broiling meat. He walked faster, almost running, trailing the smoke.

He came to the edge of a sea of grass, a rolling meadow of green. He saw the orange fire at the very

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edge of the timber, blazing up with sap-rich hissings and cracklings. He smelled the dripping meat hanging over the flames. . . .

He saw the men, three of them, standing around the fire. Big men, men his own size, their muscles as golden as the sun in the sky. They saw him, smiled at him, waved to him.

Sam waved back. He knew there was nothing to fear here, and hurried toward the fire with a steady, eager step. He walked proudly, his head erect, his heart full.

And Sam Kingsley heard at last that far, free wind that stirs the world. He felt within him the deep beat of a living sea, and knew that he had found peace at the end of his journey, a peace as bright with promise as the morning sun.

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- BESTSELLER MYSTERY—*"Don't Look Back," by Miriam Borgenicht. Abridged edition. "Sheer suspense . . . brilliantly sustained," says the New York* Times *of this story of a girl's terror-stricken flight from kidnappers in a corrupt town.*

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Cecil Corwin was once a prolific and brilliant writer of science fiction. You'll find 43 entries, under his own name and his many pseudonyms, in Donald Day's INDEX; *he has appeared in F&SF* (The Mask of Demeter, *January, 1953) and he once received a Jules Verne Award. If you're wondering why you have not seen Mr. Corwin's name in print recently, you'll find the answer (along with at least part of The Answer) in one of the oddest stories ever to turn up on even this editorial desk.*

MS. Found in a Chinese Fortune Cookie

by C. M. KORNBLUTH

THEY SAY I AM MAD, BUT I AM NOT mad—damn it, I've written and sold two million words of fiction and I know better than to start a story like that, but this isn't a story and they *do* say I'm mad—catatonic schizophrenia with assaultive episodes—and I'm *not.* [*This is clearly the first of the Corwin Papers. Like all the others it is written on a Riz-La cigarette paper with a ball point pen. Like all the others it is headed:* Urgent: Finder please send to C. M. Kornbluth, Wantagh, N. Y. Reward! *I might comment that this is typical of Corwin's generosity with his friends' time and money, though his attitude is at least this once justified by his desperate plight. As his longtime friend and, indeed, literary executor, I was clearly the person to turn to. CMK*] I have to convince you, Cyril, that I am both sane and the victim of an enormous conspiracy—and that you are too, and that everybody is. A tall order, but I am going to try to fill it by writing an orderly account of the events leading up to my present situation. [*Here ends the first paper. To keep the record clear I should state that it was forwarded to me by a Mr. L. Wilmot Shaw who found it in a fortune cookie he ordered for dessert at the Great China Republic Restaurant in San Francisco. Mr. Shaw suspected it was "a publicity gag" but sent it to me nonetheless, and received by return mail my thanks and my check for one dollar. I had not realized that Corwin and his wife had disappeared from their home*

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at Painted Post; I was merely aware that it had been weeks since I'd heard from him. We visited infrequently. To be blunt, he was easier to take via mail than face to face. For the balance of this account I shall attempt to avoid tedium by omitting the provenance of each paper, except when noteworthy, and its length. The first is typical—a little over a hundred words. I have, of course, kept on file all correspondence relating to the papers, and am eager to display it to the authorities. It is hoped that publication of this account will nudge them out of the apathy with which they have so far greeted my attempts to engage them. CMK]

On Sunday, May 13, 1956, at about 12:30 P.M., I learned The Answer. I was stiff and aching because all Saturday my wife and I had been putting in young fruit trees. I like to dig, but I was badly out of condition from an unusually long and idle winter. Creatively, I felt fine. I'd been stale for months, but when spring came the sap began to run in me too. I was bursting with story ideas; scenes and stretches of dialog were jostling one another in my mind; all I had to do was let them flow onto paper.

When The Answer popped into my head I thought at first it was an idea for a story—a very good story. I was going to go downstairs and bounce it off my wife a few times to test it, but I heard the sewing machine buzzing and remembered she had said she was way behind on her mending. Instead, I put my feet up, stared blankly through the window at the pasture-and-wooded-hills View we'd bought the old place for, and fondled the idea.

What about, I thought, using the idea to develop a messy little local situation, the case of Mrs. Clonford? Mrs. C. is a neighbor, animal-happy, land-poor and unintentionally a fearsome oppressor of her husband and children. Mr. C. is a retired brakeman with a pension and his wife insists on him making like a farmer in all weathers and every year he gets pneumonia and is pulled through with antibiotics. All he wants is to sell the damned farm and retire with his wife to a little apartment in town. All *she* wants is to mess around with her cows and horses and sub-marginal acreage.

I got to thinking that if you noised the story around *with* a comment based on The Answer, the situation would automatically untangle. They'd get their apartment, sell the farm and everybody would be happy, including Mrs. C. It would be interesting to write, I thought idly, and then I thought not so idly that it would be interesting to *try*—and then I sat up sharply with a dry mouth and a systemful of adrenalin. *It would work.* The Answer would work.

I ran rapidly down a list of other problems, ranging from the town

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drunk to the guided-missile race. The Answer worked. Every time.

I was quite sure I had turned paranoid, because I've seen so much of that kind of thing in science fiction. Anybody can name a dozen writers, editors and fans who have suddenly seen the light and determined to lead the human race onward and upward out of the old slough. Of course The Answer looked logical and unassailable, but so no doubt did poor Charlie McGandress' project to unite mankind through science fiction fandom, at least to him. So, no doubt, did [*I have here omitted several briefly sketched case histories of science fiction personalities as yet uncommitted. The reason will be obvious to anyone familiar with the law of libel. Suffice it to say that Corwin argues that science fiction attracts an unstable type of mind and sometimes insidiously undermines its foundations on reality. CMK*]

But I couldn't just throw it away without a test. I considered the wording carefully, picked up the extension phone on my desk and dialed Jim Howlett, the appliance dealer in town. He answered. "Corwin, Jim," I told him. "I have an idea—oops! The samovar's boiling over. Call me back in a minute, will you?" I hung up.

He called me back in a minute; I let our combination—two shorts and a long—ring three times before I picked up the phone. "What was that about a samovar?" he asked, baffled.

"Just kidding," I said. "Listen Jim, why don't you try a short story for a change of pace? Knock off the novel for a while—" He's hopefully writing a big historical about the Sullivan Campaign of 1779, which is our local chunk of the Revolutionary War; I'm helping him a little with advice. Anybody who wants as badly as he does to get out of the appliance business is entitled to some help.

"Gee, I don't know," he said. As he spoke the volume of his voice dropped slightly but definitely, three times. That meant we had an average quota of party line snoopers listening in. "What would I write about?"

"Well, we have this situation with a neighbor, Mrs. Clonford," I began. I went through the problem and made my comment based on The Answer. I heard one of the snoopers gasp. Jim said when I was finished: "I don't really think it's for me, Cecil. Of course it was nice of you to call, but—"

Eventually a customer came into the store and he had to break off.

I went through an anxious crabby twenty-four hours.

On Monday afternoon the paper woman drove past our place and shot the rolled-up copy of the Pott Hill *Evening Times* into the orange-painted tube beside our mailbox. I raced for it, yanked it open to the seventh page and read:

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"FARM SALE
Owing to Ill Health and Age Mr. & Mrs. Ronald Clonford Will sell their Entire Farm, All Machinery and Furnishings and All Live Stock at Auction Saturday May 19 12:30 P.M. Rain or Shine, Terms Cash Day of Sale, George Pfennig,
Auctioneer."

[*This is one of the few things in the Corwin Papers which can be independently verified. I looked up the paper and found that the ad was run about as quoted. Further, I interviewed Mrs. Clonford in her town apartment. She told me she "just got tired 'of farmin', I guess. Kind of hated to give up my ponies, but people was beginning to say it was too hard of a life for Ronnie and I guess they was right." CMK*]

Coincidence? Perhaps. I went upstairs with the paper and put my feet up again. I could try a hundred more piddling tests if I wished, but why waste time? If there was anything to it, I could type out The Answer in about two hundred words, drive to town, tack it on the bulletin board outside the firehouse and—snowball. Avalanche!

I didn't do it, of course—for the same reason I haven't put down the two hundred words of The Answer yet on a couple of these cigarette papers. It's rather dreadful—isn't it—that I haven't done so, that a simple feasible plan to ensure peace, progress and equality of opportunity among all mankind, may be lost to the world if, say, a big meteorite hits the asylum in the next couple of minutes. But—I'm a writer. There's a touch of intellectual sadism in us. We like to dominate the reader as a matador dominates the bull; we like to tease and mystify and at last show what great souls we are by generously flipping up the shade and letting the sunshine in. Don't worry. Read on. You will come to The Answer in the proper artistic place for it. [*At this point I wish fervently to dissociate myself from the attitudes Corwin attributes to our profession. He had—has, I hope—his eccentricities, and I consider it inexcusable of him to tar us all with his personal brush. I could point out, for example, that he once laboriously cultivated a 16th Century handwriting which was utterly illegible to the modern reader. The only reason apparent for this, as for so many of his traits, seemed to be a wish to annoy as many people as possible. CMK*]

Yes; I am a writer. A matador does not show up in the bull ring with a tommy gun and a writer doesn't do things the simple, direct way. He makes the people writhe a little first. So I called Fred Greenwald. Fred had been after me for a while to speak at one of the Thursday Rotary meetings and I'd been reluctant to set a date. I have a little speech for such occasions, "The Business of Being a Writer"—all about the archaic royalty system of

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payment, the difficulty of proving business expenses, the Margaret Mitchell tax law and how it badly needs improvement, what copyright is and isn't, how about all these generals and politicians with their capital-gains memoirs. I pass a few galley sheets down the table and generally get a good laugh by holding up a Doubleday book contract, silently turning it over so they can see how the fine print goes on and on, and then flipping it open so they see there's twice as much fine print as they thought there was. I had done my stuff for Oswego Rotary, Horseheads Rotary and Cannon Hole Rotary; now Fred wanted me to do it for Painted Post Rotary.

So I phoned him and said I'd be willing to speak this coming Thursday. Good, he said. On a discovery I'd made about the philosophy and technique of administration and interpersonal relationships, I said. He sort of choked up and said well, we're broadminded here.

I've got to start cutting this. I have several packs of cigarette papers left but not enough to cover the high spots if I'm to do them justice. Let's just say the announcement of my speech was run in the Tuesday paper [*It was. CMK*] and skip to Wednesday, my place, about 7:30 P.M. Dinner was just over and my wife and I were going to walk out and see how [*At this point I wish to insert a special note concerning some difficulty I had in obtaining the next four papers. They got somehow into the hands of a certain literary agent who is famous for a sort of "finders-keepers" attitude more appropriate to the eighth grade than to the law of literary property. In disregard of the fact that Corwin retained physical ownership of the papers and literary rights thereto, and that I as the addressee possessed all other rights, he was blandly endeavoring to sell them to various magazines as "curious fragments from Corwin's desk". Like most people, I abhor lawsuits; that's the fact this agent lives on. I met his outrageous price of five cents a word "plus postage(!)." I should add that I have not heard of any attempt by this gentleman to locate Corwin or his heirs in order to turn over the proceeds of the sale, less commission. CMK*] the new fruit trees were doing when a car came bumping down our road and stopped at our garden fence gate.

"See what they want and shove them on their way," said my wife. "We haven't got much daylight left." She peered through the kitchen window at the car, blinked, rubbed her eyes and peered again. She said uncertainly: "It looks like—no! Can't be." I went out to the car.

"Anything I can do for you?" I asked the two men in the front seat. Then I recognized them. One of them was about my age, a wiry lad in a T-shirt. The other man was plump and graying and ministerial, but jolly. They were un-

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mistakable; they had looked out at me—one scowling, the other smiling—from a hundred book ads. It was almost incredible that they knew each other, but there they were sharing a car.

I greeted them by name and said: "This is odd. I happen to be a writer myself. I've never shared the best-seller list with you two, but—"

The plump ministerial man tut-tutted. "You are thinking negatively," he chided me. "Think of what you *have* accomplished. You own this lovely home, the valuation of which has just been raised two thousand dollars due entirely to the hard work and frugality of you and your lovely wife; you give innocent pleasure to thousands with your clever novels; you help to keep the good local merchants going with your patronage. Not least, you have fought for your country in the wars and you support it with your taxes."

The man in the T-shirt said raspily: "Even if you din't have the dough to settle in full on April 15 and will have to pay six per cent per month interest on the unpaid balance when and if you ever do pay it, you poor shnook."

The plump man said, distressed: "Please, Michael—you are not thinking positively. This is neither the time nor the place—"

"What's going on?" I demanded. Because I hadn't even told my *wife* I'd been a little short on the '55 federal tax.

"Let's go inna house," said the T-shirted man. He got out of the car, brushed my gate open and walked coolly down the path to the kitchen door. The plump man followed, sniffing our rose-scented garden air appreciatively, and I came last of all, on wobbly legs.

When we filed in my wife said: "My God. It *is* them."

The man in the T-shirt said: "Hiya, babe," and stared at her breasts. The plump man said: "May I compliment you, my dear, for a splendid rose garden. Quite unusual for this altitude."

"Thanks," she said faintly, beginning to rally. "But it's quite easy when your neighbors keep horses."

"Haw!" snorted the man in the T-shirt. "That's the stuff, babe. You grow roses like I write books. Give 'em plenty of—"

"Michael!" said the plump man.

"*Look,* you," my wife said to me. "Would you mind telling me what this is all about? I never knew you knew Dr.—"

"I don't," I said helplessly. "They seem to want to talk to me."

"Let us adjourn to your *sanctum sanctorum,*" said the plump man archly, and we went upstairs. The T-shirted man sat on the couch, the plump fellow sat in the club chair and I collapsed on the swivel chair in front of the typewriter. "Drink, anybody?" I asked, wanting one myself. "Sherry, brandy, rye, straight angostura?"

"Never touch the stinking stuff," grunted the man in the T-shirt.

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"I would enjoy a nip of brandy," said the big man. We each had one straight, no chasers, and he got down to business with: "I suppose you have discovered The Diagonal Relationship?"

I thought about The Answer, and decided that The Diagonal Relationship would be a very good name for it too. "Yes," I said. "I guess I have. Have you?"

"I have. So has Michael here. So have one thousand, seven hundred and twenty-four writers. If you'd like to know who they are, pick the one thousand, seven hundred and twenty-four top-income men of the ten thousand free-lance writers in this country and you have your men. The Diagonal Relationship is discovered on an average of three times a year by rising writers."

"Writers," I said. "Good God, why *writers?* Why not economists, psychologists, mathematicians — *real* thinkers?"

He said: "A writer's mind is an awesome thing, Corwin. What went into your discovery of The Diagonal Relationship?"

I thought a bit. "I'm doing a Civil War thing about Burnside's Bomb," I said, "and I realized that Grant could have sent in fresh troops but didn't because Halleck used to drive him crazy by telegraphic masterminding of his campaigns. That's a special case of The Answer—as I call it. Then I got some data on medieval attitudes toward personal astrology out of a book on ancient China I'm reading. Another special case. And there's a joke the monks used to write at the end of a long manuscript-copying job. Liddell Hart's theory of strategy is about half of the general military case of The Answer. The merchandizing special case shows clearly in a catalog I have from a Chicago store that specializes in selling strange clothes to bop-crazed Negroes. They all add up to the general expression, and that's that."

He was nodding. "Many, many combinations add up to The Diagonal Relationship," he said. "But only a writer cuts across sufficient fields, exposes himself to sufficient apparently unrelated facts. Only a writer has wide-open associational channels capable of bridging the gap between astrology and, ah, 'bop.' We write in our different idioms"—he smiled at the T-shirted man—"but we are writers all. Wide-ranging, omnivorous for data, equipped with superior powers of association which we constantly exercise."

"Well," I asked logically enough, "why on earth haven't you published The Diagonal Relationship? Are you here to keep me from publishing it?"

"We're a power group," said the plump man apologetically. "We have a vested interest in things as they are. Think about what The Diagonal Relationship would do to writers, Corwin."

"Sure," I said, and thought about it. "Judas Priest!" I said after a

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couple of minutes. He was nodding again. He said: "Yes. The Diagonal Relationship, if generally promulgated, would work out to approximate equality of income for all, with incentive pay only for really hard and dangerous work. Writing would be regarded as pretty much its own reward."

"That's the way it looks," I said. "One-year copyright, after all . . ."

[*Here occurs the first hiatus in the Corwin Papers. I suspect that three or four are missing. The preceding and following papers, incidentally, come from a batch of six gross of fortune cookies which I purchased from the Hip Sing Restaurant Provision Company of New York City during the course of my investigations. The reader no doubt will wonder why I was unable to determine the source of the cookies themselves and was forced to buy them from middlemen. Apparently the reason is the fantastic one that by chance I was wearing a white shirt, dark tie and double-breasted blue serge suit when I attempted to question the proprietor of the Hip Sing Company. I learned too late that this is just about the unofficial uniform of U. S. Treasury and Justice Department agents and that I was immediately taken to be such an agent. "You T-man," said Mr. Hip tolerantly, "you get cou't oh-dah, I show you books. Keep ve'y nice books, all in Chinese cha'ctahs." After that gambit he would answer me only in Chinese. How he did it I have no idea, but apparently within days every Chinese produce dealer in the United States and Canada had been notified that there was a new T-man named Kornbluth on the prowl. As a last resort I called on the New York City office of the Treasury Department Field Investigations Unit in an attempt to obtain what might be called un-identification papers. There I was assured by Mr. Gershon O'Brien, their Chinese specialist, that my errand was hopeless since the motto of Mr. Hip and his colleagues invariably was "Safety First." To make matters worse, as I left his office I was greeted with a polite smile from a Chinese lad whom I recognized as Mr. Hip's bookkeeper. CMK*].

"So you see," he went on as if he had just stated a major and a minor premise, "we watch the writers, the real ones, through private detective agencies which alert us when the first teaser appears in a newspaper or on a broadcast or in local gossip. There's always the teaser, Corwin, the rattle before the strike. We writers are like that. We've been watching you for three years now, and to be perfectly frank I've lost a few dollars wagered on you. In my opinion you're a year late."

"What's the proposition?" I asked numbly.

He shrugged. "You get to be a best-seller. We review your books, you review ours. We tell your publisher: 'Corwin's hot—promote him. Advertise him.' And he does,

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because we're good properties and he doesn't want to annoy us. You want Hollywood? It can be arranged. Lots of us out there. In short, you become rich like us and all you have to do is keep quiet about The Diagonal Relationship. You haven't told your wife, by the way?"

"I wanted to surprise her," I said.

He smiled. "They always do. Writers! Well, young man, what do you say?"

It had grown dark. From the couch came a raspy voice: "You heard what the doc said about the ones that throw in with us. I'm here to tell you that we got provisions for the ones that don't."

I laughed at him.

"One of those guys," he said flatly.

"Surely a borderline case, Michael?" said the plump man. "So many of them are."

If I'd been thinking straight I would have realized that "borderline case" did not mean "undecided" to them; it meant "danger—immediate action!"

They took it. The plump man, who was also a fairly big man, flung his arms around me and the wiry one approached in the gloom. I yelled something when I felt a hypodermic stab my arm. Then I went numb and stupid.

My wife came running up the stairs. "What's going on?" she demanded. I saw her heading for the curtain behind which we keep an aged hair-trigger Marlin .38 rifle. There was nothing wrong with her guts, but they attacked her where courage doesn't count. I croaked her name a couple of times and heard the plump man say gently, with great concern: "I'm afraid your husband needs . . . help." She turned from the curtain, her eyes wide. He had struck subtly and knowingly; there is probably not one writer's wife who does not suspect her husband is a potential psychotic.

"Dear—" she said to me as I stood there paralyzed.

He went on: "Michael and I dropped in because we both admire your husband's work; we were surprised and distressed to find his conversation so . . . disconnected. My dear, as you must know I have some experience through my pastorate with psychotherapy. Have you ever—forgive my bluntness—had doubts about his sanity?"

"Dear, what's the matter?" she asked me anxiously. I just stood there, staring. God knows what they injected me with, but its effect was to cloud my mind, render all activity impossible, send my thoughts spinning after their tails. I was insane. [*This incident, seemingly the least plausible part of Corwin's story, actually stands up better than most of the narrative to one familiar with recent advances in biochemistry. Corwin could have been injected with lysergic acid, or with protein extracts from the blood of psychotics. It is a matter of cold*

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laboratory fact that such injections produce temporary psychosis in the patient. Indeed, it is on such experimental psychoses that the new tranquilizer drugs are developed and tested. CMK]

To herself she said aloud, dully: "Well, it's finally come. Christmas when I burned the turkey and he wouldn't speak to me for a week. The way he drummed his fingers when I talked. All his little crackpot ways—how he has to stay at the Waldorf but I have to cut his hair and save a dollar. I hoped it was just the rotten weather and cabin fever. I hoped when spring came—" She began to sob. The plump man comforted her like a father. I just stood there staring and waiting. And eventually Mickey glided up in the dark and gave her a needleful too and

[*Here occurs an aggravating and important hiatus. One can only guess that Corwin and his wife were loaded into the car, driven—Somewhere, separated, and separately, under false names, committed to different mental institutions. I have recently learned to my dismay that there are states which require only the barest sort of licensing to operate such institutions. One State Inspector of Hospitals even wrote to me in these words: ". . . no doubt there are some places in our State which are not even licensed, but we have never made any effort to close them and I cannot recall any statute making such operation illegal. We are not a wealthy state like you up North and some care for these unfortunates is better than none, is our viewpoint here. . . ." CMK*]

three months. Their injections last a week. There's always somebody to give me another. You know what mental hospital attendants are like: an easy bribe. But they'd be better advised to bribe a higher type, like a male nurse, because my attendant with the special needle for me is off on a drunk. My insanity wore off this morning and I've been writing in my room ever since. A quick trip up and down the corridor collected the cigarette papers and a tiny ball point pen from some breakfast-food premium gadget. I think my best bet is to slip these papers out in the batch of Chinese fortune cookies they're doing in the bakery. Occupational therapy, this is called. My own o.t. is shoveling coal when I'm under the needle. Well, enough of this. I shall write down The Answer, slip down to the bakery, deal out the cigarette papers into the waiting rounds of cookie dough, crimp them over and return to my room. Doubtless my attendant will be back by then and I'll get another shot from him. I shall not struggle; I can only wait.

THE ANSWER: HUMAN BEINGS RAISED TO SPEAK AN INDO-IRANIAN LANGUAGE SUCH AS ENGLISH HAVE THE FOLLOWING IN

[*That is the end of the last of the*

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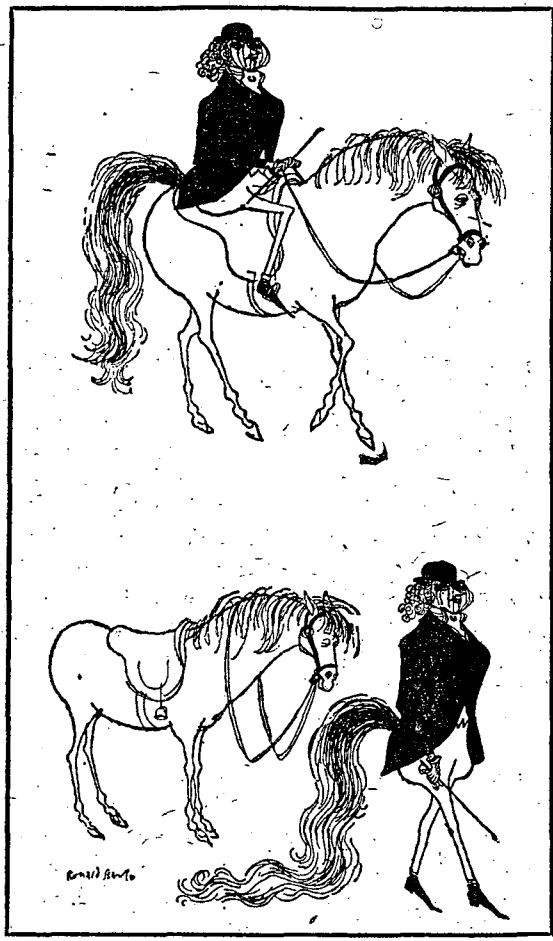
Corwin Papers. I have been able to locate. It should be superfluous to urge all readers to examine carefully any fortune cookie slips they may encounter. The next one you break open may contain what my poor friend believed, or believes, to be a great message to mankind. He may be right. His tale is a wild one but it is consistent. And it embodies the only reasonable explanation I have ever seen for the presence of certain books on the best-seller list. CMK]



The cartoon above, by Ronald Searle, appeared in his collection "The Female Approach," © 1954 by Ronald Searle. Mr. Searle appears regularly in "Punch."

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Just a year ago, in his first story for F&SF (Emily and the Bards Sublime), *Robert F. Young introduced the problem of poetical androids, whose voice-tapes bear a lyric heritage to which a world no longer listens. It is, in Mr. Young's tender treatment, an appealing subject well worth revisiting.*

Your Ghost Will Walk . . .

by ROBERT F. YOUNG

BETTY LIVED FOR THE MOMENTS SHE spent with Bob, and he, in turn, lived for the moments he spent with her. Naturally those moments were limited by their duties in the Wade household, but quite often those same duties brought them together, as, for instance, when Bob assisted in the preparation of the nightly outdoor dinner. Their eyes would meet, then, over the sizzling tenderloins or pork chops or frankfurters, and Bob would say, *"You'll love me yet!—and I can tarry your love's protracted growing—"* and Betty would answer with one of her own lines: *"say over again, and yet once over again, that thou dost love me . . ."*

Sometimes they would become so engrossed in each other that the tenderloins or the chops or the frankfurters would be burned to a crisp—even on the microwave grill, which was supposed to be above such culinary atrocities. On such occasions Mr. Wade would become furious and threaten to have their tapes cut out. Being androids, they could not, of course, distinguish between basic motives and apparent motives, so they did not know that Mr. Wade's threat stemmed from deeper frustrations than burnt tenderloins, chops, and frankfurters. But, androids or not, they were aware that without their tapes they would cease to be themselves for each other, and, several times, after Mr. Wade threatened them, they nearly ran away, and—once upon a time—they did . . .

Outdoor living was a cult in the Wade clan. None of them, from tall, exquisitely turned-out Mrs. Wade to little, dominating Dickie Wade, would have dreamed of eating dinner indoors during the summer months, unless it was raining cats and dogs and pitchforks. Grilled

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tenderloins were as much a part of their lives as the portable TV sets scattered on the disciplined sward, the two custom-built 2025 Cadillacs (Mr. Wade's gold one and Mrs. Wade's silver one), standing like juvenile spaceships in the four-lane driveway, the huge, two-toned double garage, the king-size patio fronting the one-acre ranch-style house, the outdoor swimming pool, and the pleasant vista of forested hills and dales tumbling away around them.

Outdoor living, Mr. Wade was fond of remarking, built sturdy bodies and keen minds. He usually accompanied the remark by flexing his biceps and tensing his pectorals (he was mesomorphic and proud of the fact), and appended to it by pulling out his personal talking cigarette case (he manufactured them), depressing the little button that simultaneously ejected a cigarette and activated the microscopic record containing his latest rhyme (he wrote his own), and listening appreciatively while he lit up:

Light me up and smoke me,
Blow a ring or two,
I'm a pleasure-packed diversion
Created just for you!

Ordinarily his verse had a soothing effect on him. Tonight, however, the lines irritated him, left him vaguely dissatisfied. He recognized the symptoms: the cigarette case market was overdue for a new masterpiece, and it was up to him to compose it.

The day at the factory had been a tiring one, and he sat down in his Businessman's Lounger (which had been moved out on the patio for the summer months) and let the automatic massage units go to work on him. He called to Betty to bring him an ice-cold beer. She was leaning across the microwave grill, talking to Bob, and he had to call twice before she responded. Mr. Wade's mood, which was already dark, grew darker yet. Even the ice-cold beer, when Betty finally brought it, failed to have its usual euphoric effect.

He surveyed his domain, endeavoring to revive his spirits by reviewing his possessions. There were his three small sons, squatting, hunched, and prone before their portable TV sets; there was his gold and gleaming Caddy waiting to take him wherever he wanted to go; there was his 39-21-39 wife reclining languorously in a nearby lawn chair, absorbing the last rays of the sun; there were his two rebuilt menials preparing the evening meal over the microwave grill, reciting their anachronistic poetry to each other—

Mr. Wade's face darkened to a hue that matched his mood. If they burned the tenderloins again tonight . . .

Abruptly he got up and sauntered over to the grill. He caught a fragment of verse as he came up—"*I shall never, in the years remaining, paint you pictures, no, nor carve you statues*—" Then Bob, who had been speaking, lapsed into silence. It was

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always so. There was something about Mr. Wade's presence that dampened their dialogue. But that was all right, he hastily reassured himself: he couldn't endure their poetry anyway. Nevertheless, he was piqued, and he did something he had never condescended to do before: he came out with some of his own stuff—a poetic gem that dated back to his Early Years when he was still searching for his Muse—and threw it in their faces, so to speak:

My heart's on the highways,
My hand's at the wheel
Of my brilliant and beautiful
Automobile.

They looked at him blankly. Mr. Wade knew, of course, that the blankness was no reflection on his art, that it was merely the result of his reference to an object outside the realm of their responses. Mrs. Walhurst, their original owner, had considered it inappropriate to include automobiles in their memory banks, and when Mr. Wade had had them converted, he hadn't bothered to have the deficiency corrected, not only because he hadn't thought it necessary that a maid and a butler should be conversant with such phenomena, but because of the additional expense it would entail.

Just the same, his pique intensified, turned into anger. "So maybe it isn't immortal," he said aggressively. "But it's in tune with the times and it pays a tribute to a vital economic factor!"

"Yes, Mr. Wade," Betty said.

"Certainly, Mr. Wade," said Bob.

"The trouble with you two," Mr. Wade went on, "is your lack of respect for an economic system that guarantees the prosperity and the leisure necessary for the creation of art. It's an artist's duty to fulfill his obligations to the system that makes his art possible, and the best way he can do so is by helping to make that system permanent. Maybe no one will make an animated dummy out of me when I'm gone, but my talking cigarette case line is one of the foundations on which Tomorrow will be built, an economic, practical foundation—not a bunch of silly words that no one wants to hear any more!"

"Silly words . . . ?" Betty said tentatively.

"Yes, silly words! The silly words you two whisper to each other every night when you're supposed to be cooking dinner—"

Abruptly Mr. Wade paused and sniffed the air. Something was burning. He didn't have to look far to find out what it was. His anger leaped the fence of his common sense, and he threw up his arms. "I will," he shouted. "So help me I will! I'll have your tapes cut out!" And he turned and strode furiously away.

But he doubted if he ever would. If he did, he'd have to buy new tapes to replace the old ones, and tapes ran into money. Betty and Bob had cost

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enough already without deliberately letting himself in for more expense!

Still, he reconsidered, resuming his seat on the patio, they hadn't cost anywhere near as much as a pair of made-to-order menials would have. So maybe they were a couple of antediluvian poets: they could—and did—do the work they'd been converted to do. And so maybe they did burn a tenderloin or two now and then and whisper nonsensical verse to each other whenever they got the chance: he was still getting away cheap.

In a way, he'd started a trend. Everybody was buying up eccentric androids now and having them converted for practical tasks. But he'd been the first to see the possibilities. None of the other businessmen who'd attended the auction that ensued Mrs. Walhurst's death had recognized the potentialities of a pair of androids like Betty and Bob. They'd all stood there on the unkempt lawn in front of Mrs. Walhurst's crumbling Victorian mansion, and when Betty and Bob had been led up on the auctioneer's block, all any of them had done was laugh. Not that there hadn't been sufficient justification for laughter. Imagine anyone, even a half-cracked old recluse like Mrs. Walhurst, having two *poets* built to order! It was a miracle that Androids, Inc. had even taken on the job, and Lord only knew how much they'd charged her.

Mr. Wade had laughed too, but his reaction hadn't stopped there. His mind had gone into action and he'd taken a good look at the two poets. They'd been a couple of sad-looking specimens all right, with their long hair and period clothing. But just suppose, he had thought: Suppose you were to call them by their informal, instead of their formal, names, and suppose you were to get a good barber and a good hairdresser to go to work on their hair, and a good tailor and a good dressmaker to fit them out in modern clothing—or maybe even uniforms. And then suppose you were to get a good android mechanic to convert them into, say, a— a—why yes, a maid and a butler!—the very maid and butler Mrs. Wade had wanted for so long. Why, with the money he'd save, he could easily buy the new auto-android *he'd* wanted for so long, to service his and Mrs. Wade's Caddies!

Nobody had bid against him and he'd got them for a song. The cost of converting them had been a little more than he'd anticipated, but when you compared the over-all cost with what a brand new pair of menials would have set him back, the difference was enormous.

It was also gratifying. Mr. Wade began to feel better. He felt even better after consuming three medium-rare tenderloins (Betty and Bob had made haste to atone for the fiery fate of the first batch), a bowl of tossed salad, a basket of French fries, and another ice-cold beer, and he was his Normal Self again when he got up from the rustic backyard table for his nightly Walk Around.

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It was fun walking over your own land, especially when you owned so much of it. The swimming pool was like a big silvery cigarette case in the light of the rising moon, and the portable TV sets bloomed on the lawn like gaudy chrysanthemums. The staccato sound of the cowboys shooting the Indians blended nicely with the distant hum of the traffic on highway 999.

Mr. Wade's footsteps gravitated, as they so often did of late, to the double-garage. Charley had the gold Caddy up on the hydraulic lift and was underneath it, giving it a grease job. Fascinated, Mr. Wade sat down to watch.

Watching Charley was a pastime he never tired of. Charley had cost ten times as much as Betty and Bob, but he was worth every cent of it, from the visor of his blue service station attendant's cap to the polished tips of his oil-resistant shoes. And he just loved cars. You could see his love in the way he went about his work; you could see it in his shining eyes, in his gentle, caressing hands. It was an inbuilt love, but it was a true love just the same. When Mr. Wade had set down his specifications, the man from Androids, Inc., who had come around to take the order, had objected, at first, to all the car-love Mr. Wade wanted put in. "We're a bit diffident about installing too much affection in them," the man from Androids had said. "It's detrimental to their stability."

"But don't you see?" Mr. Wade had said. "If he loves cars, and particularly Caddies, he's bound to do a better job servicing them. And not only that, I'll keep his case in the garage and leave it open all the time and he'll make a fine guard. Just let anybody try to steal my Caddy, eh?"

"That's precisely the point, Mr. Wade. You see, we wouldn't want any of our products manhandling, or perhaps I should say—ha ha—'android-handling' a human, even if the human in question *is* a thief. It would be bad publicity for us."

"I should think it would be good publicity," Mr. Wade had said. "Anyway," he went on, in a sharper tone of voice, "if you expect to sell me an auto-android, he's going to love my Caddy and that's all there is to it!"

"Oh, of course, sir. We'll build you anything you like. It's just that I felt duty-bound to point out that affection is an unpredictable quality, even in humans, and—"

"Are you going to make him the way I want him or aren't you!"

"Yes, sir. Androids, Inc. has but one aim in life: Happy Customers. Now what else in the way of personality did you have in mind, sir?"

"Well—" Mr. Wade had cleared his throat. "First of all . . ."

"Good evening, Mr. Wade," Charley said, wiping off a fitting.

"Good evening yourself," Mr. Wade said. "How's tricks?"

"Not bad, sir. Not bad." Charley applied the grease gun to the fitting, and pumped in precisely the right amount of grease.

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"Car in good shape, Charley?"

"Well . . ." The synthetic tissue of Charley's face was one of Android, Inc.'s latest triumphs. He could—and actually did—frown. "I hate to be critical, sir, but I don't think you should take her on newly tarred roads. Her undercarriage is a sight!"

"Couldn't help it, Charley. You can get the stuff off, can't you?"

"In time, sir. In time. It's not that I mind the work, of course. It's the sacrilegious nature of the act itself that irks me. Couldn't you have detoured?"

It was on the tip of Mr. Wade's tongue to say that he could have, but that he hadn't, and it was none of Charley's G.D. business anyway. But he caught himself just in time. After all, wasn't this the very reaction he had wanted in an auto-android? And didn't it go to show that Androids, Inc. had built Charley exactly according to specifications?

He said instead: "I'm sorry, Charley. I'll be more considerate next time." Then he got down to the real reason for his visit. "You like poetry, don't you, Charley?"

"I'll say, sir. Especially yours!"

A warm glow began in Mr. Wade's toes, spread deliciously upward to the roots of his hair. "Been mulling over a new rhyme. Kind of like to get your reaction."

"Shoot, sir."

"Goes like this:

Smoke me early, smoke me late,
Smoke me if you're underweight.
I'm delightful and nutritious
And decidedly delicious!

"Why, that's terrific, sir! You should really wow 'em with that one! Gee, Mr. Wade, you must be a genius to think up stuff like that."

"Well, hardly a genius—"

Charley wiped another fitting, applied the gun. "Oh yes you are, sir!"

"Well . . ."

Mr. Wade left the garage on light footsteps. He never sang in the shower, but tonight he broke tradition and gave his voice free rein. And all the while he sang, visions danced through his mind; visions of people everywhere, filing into drugstores and smoke shops, saying, "I'd like a Wade Talking Cigarette Case, please"; visions of more and more orders pouring into the factory and the cigarette companies vying with each other for an exclusive option on the new rhyme, and the conveyor belts going faster and faster and the production-line girls moving like figures in a speeded-up movie—

"Arthur!"

Mr. Wade turned the shower intercom dial to T. "Yes, dear?"

"It's Betty and Bob," Mrs. Wade said. "I can't find them anywhere!"

"Did you look in the kitchen?"

"I'm in the kitchen now and they aren't here and the dishes are all stacked in the sink and the floor hasn't been swept and—"

"I'll be right there," Mr. Wade said.

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He toweled himself hurriedly and slipped into his shirt, shorts, and slippers, all the while telling himself what he'd tell *them* when he found them. He'd lay it right on the line this time: either they got on the ball and stayed there or he'd really have their tapes cut out!

Abruptly he remembered that he'd already made the same threat quite a number of times, that he had, in fact, made it that very evening. Was it possible? Could his threatening to have their tapes cut out have had anything to do with—

But of course it couldn't have! They were only androids. What could their tapes possibly mean to them?

Still—

He joined Mrs. Wade in the kitchen and together they searched the house from front to back. The children had retired to their rooms with their TV sets some time earlier and, when questioned, said they'd seen nothing of Betty and Bob either. After the house, Mr. and Mrs. Wade searched the grounds, with the same result. Then they tried the garage, but there was no one there except Charley, who had just finished Mr. Wade's Caddy and was starting in on Mrs. Wade's. No, Charley said, running an appreciative hand along a silvery upswept tailfin, he'd seen nothing of them all evening.

"If you ask me," Mrs. Wade said, "they've run away."

"Nonsense. Androids don't run away."

"Oh yes they do. Lots of them. If you'd watch the newscasts once in a while instead of mooning all the time over what a great poet you are, you'd know about such things. Why, there was a case just the other day. One of those old models like yours, that some other cheapskate thought he could save money on, ran away. A mechanic named Kelly or Shelley or something."

"Well, did they find him?"

"They found him all right. What was left of him. Can you imagine? He tried to cross highway 656!"

Compared to highway 999, highway 656 was a sparsely traveled country road. Mr. Wade felt sick and his face showed it. He'd be in a fine fix if he had to replace Betty and Bob now, after putting up so much for Charley. He'd been a fool for not having had them completely converted in the first place.

The distant hum of the traffic was no longer a pleasant background sound. There was an ominous quality about it now. Abruptly Mr. Wade snapped into action. "Go call the police," he told his wife. "Tell them to get out here right away!"

He turned and headed for his Caddy. On an afterthought, he called Charley. "Come along, Charley," he said. "I might need your help." They were nothing but a couple of antique poets, but you never could tell. Charley'd be able to handle them all right, though; Charley could bend a crankshaft with his bare hands.

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"Get in," Mr. Wade said, and Charley slid into the seat beside him. Mr. Wade gunned the 750 h.p. motor and the Caddy shot down the drive, tires spinning.

Charley winced. "Mr. Wade, please!"

"Shut up!" Mr. Wade said.

The drive wound around forested hills, dipped deep into night-damp dales. Moonlight was everywhere: on trees and grass and macadam, in the very air itself. But Mr. Wade was unaware of it. His universe had shrunk to the length and breadth and height of the Caddy's headlights.

When his universe remained empty, he began to think that perhaps they hadn't come this way after all, that maybe they'd struck off through the surrounding countryside. Then, rounding the last curve, he saw the two familiar figures far down the drive.

They were about a hundred yards from the highway, walking hand in hand, their shoulders touching. Mr. Wade swore. The fools, he thought. The ridiculous fools! Talking about the moon, probably, or some equally asinine subject, and walking serenely to their deaths!

He slowed the Caddy when he came opposite them, and drove along beside them. If they saw the car, they gave no evidence of it. They were strolling dreamily, talking now and then in low voices. Mr. Wade hardly recognized their faces.

"Betty," he called. "Bob! I've come to take you home."

They ignored him. Completely. Utterly. Furious, he stopped the car. Abruptly it occurred to him that he was acting like a fool, that they couldn't possibly react to him as long as he remained in the Caddy, because automobiles, not being included in their memory banks, could have no reality for them.

He got out his cigarette case, intending to light a cigarette and perhaps calm himself—

Light me up and smoke me,
Blow a ring or two,
I'm a pleasure-packed diversion . .
Created just for you!

For some reason the rhyme infuriated him all the more, and he jammed the cigarette case back in his pocket and got out and started around the car. In his eagerness to reach Betty and Bob, he skirted the left front fender too closely and the case, which had become wedged in the opening of his pocket, scraped screechingly along the enamel.

Mr. Wade stopped in his tracks. Instinctively he wetted his finger and ran it over the long ragged scar. "Look Charley," he wailed. "See what they made me do!"

Charley had got out on the other side, had walked around the car, and was now standing in the moonlight a few paces away. There was a strange expression on his face. "I could kill them," Mr. Wade went on. "I could kill them with my bare hands!"

Betty and Bob were moving away from the car, still walking hand in

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hand, still talking in low voices. Beyond them the highway showed, a deadly river of hurtling lights. Bob's voice drifted back:

"Your ghost will walk, you lover of trees,
(If our loves remain)
In an English lane,
By a cornfield side a-flutter with poppies . . ."

and suddenly Mr. Wade knew.

He wondered why the answer hadn't occurred to him before. It was so simple, and yet it solved everything. Betty and Bob would be completely destroyed and yet at the same time their usefulness in the Wade menage would be enhanced. Come to think of it, though, he'd subconsciously supplied half of the answer every time he'd threatened to have their tapes cut out. It was only the second half that had eluded him: *replace those tapes with tapes containing his own poetry!*

Exhilaration flooded him. "All right, Charley," he said. "Go get them. Go get the lousy outdated bastards! . . . Charley?"

Charley's expression was more than merely strange now. It was frightening. And his eyes— "Charley!" Mr. Wade shouted. "I gave you an order. Obey it!"

Charley said nothing. He took a tentative step toward Mr. Wade. Another. For the first time Mr. Wade noticed the 12" crescent wrench in his hand. "Charley!" he screamed. "I'm your owner. Don't you remember, Charley? I'm your owner!" He tried to back away, felt his buttocks come up against the fender. Then he tried to slide along the fender, frenziedly holding up his arms to protect his face; but his arms were flesh and bone and the wrench was hardened steel, as were the sinews of the arm that wielded it, and it descended, not deviating an iota from the terrified target of Mr. Wade's face, and he slid limply down the side of the fender to the macadam and lay there in the widening pool of his blood.

Charley got the flashlight and the auto-first-aid kit out of the trunk and, kneeling by the fender, began to repaint the ragged wound.

The road was a weird and winding Wimpole Street. They walked along it, hand in hand, lost in a world they'd never made, a world that had no room for them, not even for their ghosts.

And before them, in the alien night, the highway purred and throbbed. It waited . . .

"How do I love thee—" Betty said.

"The year's at the spring—" said Bob.

Making love, say?
The happier they!

Draw yourself up from the light of the moon,
And let them pass, as they will too soon,
With the bean flowers' boon,
And the blackbird's tune,
And May, and June! . . .

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The pleasing notions of Novotny have ranged, in these pages, from a lake of pure bourbon to a lottery with Helen of Troy as prize; but the peculiar talent of Jesse Haimes may well be the most enviable idea that Novotny has yet conceived. {WARNING: I have gathered, that there are a few readers who object to sex in fantasy. It seems only fair to warn these poor abstainers from the splendid source that they should immediately and rapidly skip to page 53.}

A Trick or Two

by JOHN NOVOTNY

AT NINE THAT EVENING LAURA walked beautifully into the apartment.

"Hello, Jesse," she said softly. "For some reason I thought you had given up."

"You underestimate me, Laura," he said, removing her coat. "And yourself. You never looked lovelier."

"Thank you, Jesse," she smiled, accepting a glass of champagne. "I've never been in better shape. I'm ready to go ten rounds, if necessary."

"That was uncalled-for, darling," he said, hurt. "You make me sound crude. Perhaps in other days . . . but now I'm of a different mind."

"Fine," Laura applauded, laughing gayly. "Don't tell me what role you're playing tonight. It will be more fun if I have to guess."

Jesse had a wonderful dinner waiting and they ate by candelight. Later they sipped benedictine by the picture window overlooking the river.

"You make it seem so worthwhile, Jesse," Laura murmured. "There are moments when I almost feel like giving the devil his due."

"That's what I'm planning on," Jesse said casually.

"Oh?" Laura answered questioningly. "You expect me to succumb, to offer myself to you, out of the goodness of my heart?"

"Or the badness," Jesse added.

"I wish you luck."

"Thank you," Jesse said. "Then you agree that should you stand before me unclothed, I might assume, rightfully, that I have won the game?"

"Unclothed—by force?"

"No, my dear. No force," he smiled.

"I agree that under those circum-

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stances you'd have a pretty good assumption," Laura said. "When do you expect me to go into this disrobing act?"

"Most anytime," Jesse said. "To hasten your decision, let me show you a few little presents I have for you."

Jesse kept himself from hurrying as he led her to the two closet doors. He opened one and pointed to the furs hanging inside.

"My choice?" Laura asked.

"All of them," Jesse said. "Look them over."

She stepped inside the closet and Jesse smiled. His mind raced over the events of the past week.

Jesse Haimes sipped his Scotch pensively, then placed the glass decisively on the table and leaned toward his friend.

"Mind you, Tom," he said, "it isn't that I haven't tried. Lord knows, I've played the gentleman, the brother, and the man-of-the-world. I've been patient, impatient, persuasive."

"Generous?" Tom inquired.

"Abundantly," Jesse insisted. "I even bought her a poodle."

"And through it all," Tom Casey smiled, "Miss Laura Carson remains unconquered, unsullied, unbowed."

"Disgustingly so," Jesse admitted.

"Let's have another drink," Tom suggested, signaling the waiter. "Or do you have a conference this afternoon?"

"Nothing," Jesse said. "A few letters to get out and some desks must be moved. We're changing the accounting room to the Forty-eighth Street side."

"Dry work," Tom Casey said. "Another scotch is definitely in order."

They sat back, waiting for the drinks, and pondered the enigma of Miss Laura Carson. Tom watched Jesse light a cigarette. As Jesse brought his hand down to drop the match in the ash tray, Tom reached forward and snapped his fingers.

"Abra-ca-dabra," he said. The ash tray vanished. Jesse's hand froze and he stared at the spot where the glass container had rested. Finally he smiled foolishly.

"Well done, Tom," he said. "How did you do it?"

"Magic," Tom said, self-consciously. "I don't usually fool around in public, but I just had the urge."

"I didn't know that was your hobby."

"It's not," Tom laughed. "That's my trick. Nothing else."

"Bring it back," Jesse said.

"I can't," Tom confessed. "I can make small items disappear. Where they go, I have no idea."

Jesse stopped smiling and began to frown. He restrained himself as the waiter approached and served the drinks. He watched the man walk away; then he turned hurriedly back to Tom Casey.

"Are you trying to tell me that this business is on the level?" he

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demanded, gesturing aimlessly at the center of the table. Tom nodded foolishly.

"I don't believe it," Jesse said. "After all . . . come now, Tom."

"Put your swizzle stick out there," Tom said.

Jesse slowly pushed the plastic stirring rod to the spot indicated. Tom snapped his fingers at the stick.

"Abra-ca-dabra," he said. The object disappeared.

"Good Lord," Jesse breathed. "And to think I doubted Dunninger."

The two men sat silently until Jesse called the waiter.

"Two more scotches," he ordered, "and an ash tray."

The waiter brought the drinks and the ash tray, surveyed the table and its occupants suspiciously, and departed.

"Can you teach me?" Jesse asked.

"I don't think so," Tom explained. "An old proofreader out in Denver told me about it. Everybody has one trick he can do. The proofreader could change water into whisky. That was his trick and a very handy one."

"Do you mean I have some bit of magic I can do?" Jesse asked excitedly.

"Everyone has," Tom said. "Mine you just saw."

"How does a person find out his trick—if that's what you call it?"

Tom shrugged.

"Most people never do, I guess," he said. "I just stumbled on mine."

"Maybe mine is the same as yours," Jesse suggested.

"Try it," Tom said, isolating the ash tray. Jesse replaced it with a swizzle stick.

"The waiter would raise hell about another ash tray," he explained. He took a deep breath, snapped his fingers, and intoned the necessary phrase. The stirrer remained.

"Did I do something wrong?" Jesse asked hopefully. Tom shook his head.

"Perfect technique," he said. "Negative result."

"I guess I have a different talent," Jesse murmured. "Damn it! How am I going to find out what it is?"

"It's not that important," Tom Casey said. "Unless it's the water and whisky deal, of course."

The waiter was summoned again and soon Jesse was glaring balefully at a glass of water.

"No luck," Tom said. "I wouldn't worry about it. As I said, I hardly ever use mine. It's embarrassing when people ask questions. I can't explain the trick, so I automatically am classified as a stinker or a drunken bum. I'd just forget about it if I were you."

Jesse shook his head. The two men finished their drinks and left the restaurant. As they parted at Madison and 49th, Jesse smiled at his companion.

"First time in weeks I've been able to think about something other

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than Laura Carson," he said. "See you next week."

"These letters, Mr. Haimes—"

Jesse smiled at the slim brunette.

"Yes, Carol?"

"They're ready for your signature. And Mr. Wigmann would like to have two more cabinets in Accounts Payable."

"Fine," Jesse said, accepting the papers. "Tell Wiggy he'll have his cabinets in a few days."

He watched his secretary walk to her desk in the far corner of the large, tastefully decorated office they shared. After the girl settled at the desk and was busy calling Wigmann's secretary, Jesse drew his hand out from under his own desk. He looked down expectantly at the hat he held.

"Abra-ca-dabra," he muttered. No rabbit materialized.

"Thank God," he whispered. "I wasn't particularly anxious to have that ability."

Carol finished her call and came across the office.

"Yes, Carol?"

"Mr. Wigmann requests that if the cabinets are among the surplus items in the next room, could he look at them, in order to plan where they will be placed."

"Tell him to come over in five minutes. We may have to move a few things."

The girl returned to the phone and then joined Jesse as he unlocked the door to the small office next to his. It had been pressed into use as a storage area during the reorganization period and was filled with varied pieces of office equipment. Jesse pointed.

"As I suspected," he said. "Damn! All the way in the back. I'll push these desks aside if you'll move the lamps and chairs."

After a few moments of cooperative endeavor Carol and Jesse Haimes stood before the two cabinets. Each was two and a half feet wide by seven feet tall. The cabinets had no shelves and were intended to hold clothing. Jesse opened one of the metal doors and looked inside.

"Wiggy will have to arrange for shelves," he said, closing the door. "He can call Griswold and—"

Jesse stopped and looked at the cabinet. Dimly he recalled a vaudeville act he had once enjoyed.

"Carol," he said, hesitantly. "Would you—well, this may seem odd—"

"Yes, Mr. Haimes?"

Jesse decided that wording was less important than results.

"Would you mind stepping into this cabinet for one moment?"

Carol smiled.

"Into the—cabinet?"

"Yes. Into the cabinet."

"I don't understand."

"In all probability," Jesse said, "there will be nothing to understand. If there is I will explain later."

"I hope so," Carol said, still smil-

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ing. She lifted the hem of her skirt slightly and stepped up into the locker-like affair.

"Thank you," Jesse said. He closed the door and stepped back. With squared shoulders he faced the cabinet.

"Abra-ca-dabra," he said, softly enough so that Carol couldn't hear. He opened the cabinet and smiled in assuringly. Jesse swallowed hard as he looked at the empty space. Hurriedly he leaped to the remaining cabinet and opened the door.

"Don't be alarmed, Car—Oh, Lord!"

Carol stood framed in the cabinet. She was nude and she was angry. Jesse looked away and then, deciding the hell with it, he looked back.

"What have you done with your clothes?" he asked.

"What have *I* done?" Carol said, ominously. She pushed one bare foot forward, then pointed to her neck. "From pumps to my black choker ribbon. *Whsst.* You've never been better."

She stepped carelessly from the cabinet and sank into one of the surplus swivel chairs.

"You said you'd explain," she said. "This had better be good. Your apartment is one thing, the office is entirely different. I've always insisted—"

She stopped and looked at the cabinet she had just vacated.

"That's not the one I— Oh brother, you better start talking. I think I'll scream."

She opened her mouth and Jesse leaped forward to cover it with his hand.

"I can explain!" he said quickly. Carol relaxed and Jesse took his hand away.

"OK," she said. "Explain."

Jesse looked at the two cabinets and then back at Carol.

"I can't," he said unhappily. Carol opened her mouth wide.

"Wait!" Jesse pleaded. "I mean I don't know how it happened. Passing you from one cabinet to another just happens to be my trick."

"Oh," Carol said, raising her eyebrows. "Your trick, eh? Do you mind if your naked little secretary says you certainly have a fine collection. And may I ask what you intend to do right now?"

She swiveled in the chair and made a complete circle.

"Not very much room in here," she said tersely.

"Carol, I—"

"Apartments are apartments. Offices are offices. And I don't care for that trick. If you—"

"Mr. Haimes. Mr. Haimes."

They both leaped up as Mr. Wigmann's voice floated in from Jesse's office.

"Wait there!" Jesse shouted.

"Oh, I can come in and—"

"No," Jesse shouted frantically. "Just wait a moment. Until I get things—straightened out."

"Very well," Wiggy answered. They could hear his steps as he wandered about the office.

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"Get in the cabinet," Jesse whispered to Carol.

"Like hell," Carol whispered. "Never again."

"Carol," Jesse pleaded. He leaned down and kissed her full on the lips. "Ten dollars a week raise. The Winter Garden and the Stork Club one evening next week. A new gown."

Carol melted.

"Mr. Haimes. That isn't necessary."

"It certainly is," he said. "I've done you an injustice. Offices are offices. I promise to remember."

She threw both bare arms around his neck and kissed him. Drawing away, she smiled, "Into the cabinet." As she stepped in, Jesse permitted himself one light pat on Carol's pert rump and closed the door.

"Wiggy," he called. "Now you can come in. I've finally located them."

Mr. Wigmann walked into the smaller room and approached the cabinets.

"Excellent, perfect," he said. "Good of you, Haimes, to go to the trouble. Heavens, you're perspiring something fierce. I assure you I could have waited."

"Not at all," Jesse assured him, leading him away.

"But the insides—"

"Nothing. Bare," Jesse coughed on the last word. "You'll have to arrange for shelves. See Griswold."

He ushered Wiggy to the door, shook hands, and propelled the little man into the hall. Jesse then went to the phone and dialed.

"Miss Devins? Jesse Haimes," he announced. "No, don't call B. J. I want to speak to you. I have a favor to ask. My club is putting on a show and we're missing one outfit—a girl's. I'd have asked Carol but she is out on business at the moment.—You will? Fine.—Size?—Oh, about Carol's size. One each of the following: dress . . ."

A little later he returned to the small office and released Carol.

"Don't worry about your clothes," he said. "I've sent down for a complete new outfit."

"Who?"

"B. J.'s secretary. Miss Devins," he told her.

"Good," Carol smiled. "She has excellent taste and is very conscientious. She'll take at least an hour."

Hand in hand they returned to Jesse's office.

Three days later he completed the construction work in his apartment. The two cabinets were built in flush with the wall and looked like nothing else than closet doors. Jesse put his tools away and prepared the final test. He took the small kewpie doll and placed it on the floor of closet number one. Carefully he patted the lace dress in place and rearranged the tiny cap. Finally he stood up, closed the door, and backed off.

"Abra-ca-dabra," he said, waving a few fingers negligently. He strode to cabinet number two, opened the door, and smiled as he picked up the shiny little plastic body.

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"Excellent," he murmured. "Now to call Miss Laura Carson."

Jesse silently closed the cabinet door behind Laura as she hummed through the furs. Quickly he stepped back and raised his arm.

"Abra-ca-dabra," he sang.

The room was quiet except for the soft music Jesse had playing in the background. He walked to cabinet two and opened the door. Laura stood there and Jesse drew a deep breath even though he was prepared. She smiled, unflustered and completely calm, as she stepped from the cabinet. Her body was flawless, perfect, warm and soft. Graceful movements shadowed ivory-tan skin as she walked in the soft lights. Her dark hair was long and lay tantalizingly on exquisite shoulders. Jesse was forced to lock his hands behind his back. Laura walked halfway across the room, then turned and looked at the two doors.

"You're naked," Jesse said hoarsely. Laura looked down at herself.

"Never more so," she laughed. As her body moved in laughter Jesse was forced to remove his tie. Laura walked to the big window where moonlight crept across her body. Jesse removed his shirt.

"You seem very much at ease," he remarked. "No surprise?"

Laura shook her head as he continued undressing.

"It's quite obvious that you have discovered your trick," she said.

For a moment Jesse stopped, balancing on one leg.

"Even so," he said, determined not to lose the advantage, "the circumstances have worked out."

"That's true," Laura said, "but please do me a favor."

"Yes?"

"Will you hold that fire iron out at arm's length?"

Jesse walked wonderingly to the fireplace, picked up the poker, and held it out. Laura raised a long slender forefinger and pointed at the brass tool; and in Jesse's hand the poker became pliable, soft, and wilted like wax before a flame. He stared at it in horror.

"Jesse," Laura said. "I discovered my trick long ago."

The Unfortunate Topologist

A burleycue dancer, a pip
Named Virginia, could peel in a zip;
But she read science fiction
And died of constriction
Attempting a Möbius strip.

S. D. GOTTESMAN

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Those who skipped the Novotny story because it contained sex may safely resume their reading here, even though Mr. Anderson's narrative is, as its title indicates, primarily concerned with nothing else. For it is surely a corollary to Comstock's First Law ("the censorability of mammae varies in inverse ratio to the amount of melanin in the skin") that the obscenity of the sexual processes of any race varies in direct ratio to the kinship of that race with the race judging; and Anderson's wholly alien Mercurians are much too silicious to be salacious. But their sex-life, if unalluring, offers a mystery upon the solution to which depend the lives of two Earthmen—and possibly the future of Earth.

Life Cycle

by **POUL ANDERSON**

"WELL, ALL RIGHT! I'LL GO TO THEIR damned temple myself!"

"You must be crazy even to think of such a *tonteria*," said Juan Navarro. He sucked hard on his pipe, decided it was finished, and knocked out the dottle. "They would tear you in pieces."

"Quicker than starving to death on this hellbound lump of rock."

"*Very* small pieces." Navarro sat down on a workbench and swung his legs. He was a Basque, medium-sized, longheaded, dark-haired, with the mountaineer's bony independence in his face. He was also a biologist of distinction, an amateur violinist, and a hungry man waiting to die. "You don't understand, Joe. Those Dayside beings are not just another race. They are *gods*."

Joe Kingsbury Thayendanegea, who was a stocky Mohawk from upper New York State, paced the caging space of the room, hands behind his back, and swore. If he had had a tail, he would have lashed it. He was the pilot and engineer, the only other Terrestrial on Mercury. When you dove this far down into the sun's monstrous gravitational well, you couldn't take a big crew along.

"So what else can you think of?" he challenged. "Shall we draw straws and barbecue the loser?"

Antella, the owl-faced Martian mineralogist, made a harsh cawing

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in his gray-feathered throat. "Best it be me," he advised. "Then no one is technically guilty of cannibalism."

"Not much meat on that skinny little frame of yours, *amigo*," said Navarro. "And a human body would have so many other uses after one was finished with the organic parts. Make the vertebrae into chessmen—the ribs into Venetian blinds for bay windows—yes, and the skulls would make distinctive mousetraps."

Kingsbury shook heavy shoulders and thrust his beaky face forward. "What are we yattering about?" he demanded. "We've got a week's slim rations left aboard this clunk. After that we start starving."

"So you are going to the temple and confront the gods and convince them of the error of their ways. Ka!" Antella clicked his short, curved bill. "Or did you think to threaten them with our one solitary pistol?"

"I'm going to try and find out what the Twonks—or their gods, if you insist—have against us," said Kingsbury. "Here's the idea; it's getting close to sunrise time, and there'll be a crowd of 'em at the temple. I'll go out on Dayside and find me an empty Twonk shell and get into it. With luck, I'll pass unnoticed long enough to—"

Antella's brass-colored eyes widened. "The scheme is a bold one," he admitted. "As far as I know, there is strict silence during the ceremonies, whatever they are. You just might accomplish it."

Navarro leered. "I know exactly what you would accomplish, Joe. Do you remember that story you tell me, oh, last year I think it was? About the tourist in the North forest, and the Canuck guide, and the moose call?"

"Yeah. 'Ze moose, she—' Hey! What do you mean?"

"Precisely. That temple is a breeding place. They go there to breed."

"How do *you* know? I've been tramping around arguing with the damn Twonks, and you've just sat here in the lab."

Navarro shrugged. "What else could I do but my research? I studied the biochemistry of Mercurian life. I worked out the life cycle of a few plants and one insectoidal form."

"They all look like insects. But go on."

"The first expedition established no more than that Mercurian life has a silicate base," recapitulated Navarro. "Otherwise they were too busy staying alive and teaching English to the natives and making maps. But they brought home specimens, which were analyzed. And one strange fact became evident: those specimens could not reproduce under Twilight Zone conditions. Yet they live here! And we see the natives lay eggs, which hatch; and lower forms bring forth their own kind in various ways—"

"I know," grunted Kingsbury. "But why? I mean, what's so puzzling about their reproduction?"

"The cells are totally different,

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both physically and chemically, from protoplasmic life," said Navarro. "But there are analogues; there have to be. The basic process is the same, meiosis and mitosis, governed by a molecular 'blueprint' not unlike our chromosomes. However, though we know that such processes *must* take place, the silicate materials involved are too stable to undergo them. The ordinary exothermic reactions which fuel Mercurian life do not produce enough energy for the cell-duplication which is growth. In fact, adult Mercurians are even incapable of self-repair; wounds do not heal, they must depend on being so tough that in this low gravity they suffer few injuries."

"So what happens?"

Navarro shrugged. "I do not know, except this much: that somehow, at breeding time, they must pick up an extra charge of energy. Analyzing small animals, I have identified the compound which is formed to store this energy and release it, by gradually breaking down, as the organism grows. It is all used up at maturity. But where is the temperature necessary to build up this molecule? Only on Dayside.

"Now these gods are said to live on Dayside and meet the Twonks of Twilight at the temple. You know the breeding ceremonies take place when libration has brought the temple into the sunlight."

"Go on," said Antella thoughtfully.

"*Pues,* one of the plants has this life cycle: it grows in the Twilight Zone, on the sunward side, and its vines are phototropic. Eventually their growth and the libration bring them into the light. The spore-pods burst and the spores are scattered into the air. A few are blown back into Twilight, and they are now fertile; radiation has formed the necessary compound. Or consider one of the small insectoids I studied. It breeds here in the usual manner, then the female crawls out into the light to lay her eggs. When they hatch, the little ones scurry back to the shade, and some of them reach shelter before they fry. Wasteful, of course, but even on this barren planet nature is a notorious spendthrift."

"Wait a minute!" interrupted Kingsbury. Navarro liked to hear himself talk, but there are limits. "Are you implying that the Dayside gods are merely the sun? That because the Twonks have to have light when they breed, they've built up a sort of Apollo-cum-fertility cult?"

"Why not? There are races on Earth and Mars with similar beliefs. To this day, here and there in my own Pyrenees, many women believe the wind can make them pregnant." Navarro laughed. "It is a good excuse anyhow, no?"

"But damn it, there's Dayside life too. Life that never comes into Twilight."

"Yes, yes, of course. Quite different from Twilight biology—after all, it has to live at a temperature of four hundred degrees Centigrade. Possi-

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bly the Twonks regard some Dayside animal as a sort of fertility totem. I am only saying this: that if the gods are actually the sun, you will have Satan's own time persuading the sun to take back its edict that we must die."

In the end, there was a decision. Navarro thought Kingsbury a suicidal idiot . . . but what choice was there? They would go to the temple together, disguised, and find out what they could; if there were no gods, but only some fanatically conservative priestess behind the death sentence, a .20-caliber Magnum automatic might make her see reason. Antella would stay behind to guard the ship; he couldn't take heat as well as an Earthling.

The humans donned their spacesuits and went through the airlock. Navarro had the gun, Kingsbury armed himself with a crowbar; at last and worst, he thought savagely, he'd crack a few Mercurian carapaces.

They stepped out into desolation. Behind them lay the *Explorer,* a crippled metal giant, no more to them than a shelter. In the end, perhaps, a coffin. There was no possibility of rescue from Earth—radio communication was out, with the sun so close, and Mercury Expedition Two wasn't due back for six months. Earth wouldn't even realize they were in trouble till they had already died.

To right and left, the dry valley lifted into gaunt ocherous peaks. against a dusky sky where a few hard stars glittered. There were bushes scattered about, low things with blue metallic-looking leaves. A small animal bounded from them, its shell agleam in the wan light. The ground was slaty rubble, flaked off in departed ages when Mercury still had weather. Above the peaks to the left hung a white glare, the invisible sun. It would never be seen from here, but a few miles further west the planet's libration would lift it briefly and unendurably over the near horizon.

There was a wind blowing; the wind is never quiet on Mercury, where one side is hot enough to melt lead and the other close to absolute zero. It sent a ghostly whirl of dust-devils across the valley. There wasn't much air: a man would have called it a soft vacuum, and not fit to breathe at any density. Most of it had long ago escaped into space or frozen on Darkside, but now vapor pressure had struck a balance and there was some carbon dioxide, nitrogen, ammonia, and inert gas free. Enough to blow fine dust up against the weak gravity, and to form an ionosphere which made radio communication possible over the horizon.

Kingsbury shuddered, remembering green forests and clear streams under the lordly sky of Earth. What the devil had inspired him to come here? Money, he supposed. Earth needed fissionable ores and Mercury

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had them, and Expedition Two was sent to negotiate an agreement with the natives. The pay was proportional to the risk . . . but what use is all the money in the cosmos to a dead man?

"When I get home," said Navarro wistfully, "after the parades and banquets—yes, surely there will be parades, with all the pretty girls throwing flowers and kisses at us—after that I shall retire to my own village and sit down before the tavern and order a bottle of the best Amontillado. Three days later I will ask them to sweep the cobwebs off me. A week later I shall go home and sleep."

"I'll settle for a tall cold beer in Gavagan's," said Kingsbury. "You ought to let me take you pubcrawling in New York sometime—Bah!" His gauntleted hand made a vicious gesture at the tumbled ruin of a landscape. "What makes you think we ever will get home?"

"Nothing," said Navarro gently, "except that I will not permit myself to think otherwise."

They rounded a tall red crag and saw how the valley broadened into cultivated fields, ironberry bushes and flintgrain stalks. On the dusky edge of vision was the Mercurian hive, a giant dome of crushed rock in which several thousand natives dwelt. There were hundreds of such barracks, scattered around the Twilight Zone, with a temple for every dozen or so. Apparently there was no variation in language or culture over the whole planet—understandable when the habitable area was so small. And it was an open question how much individual personality a Mercurian had, and how much of her belonged to the hive-mind.

Close at hand was the hut which held their lives. It was a crude, roofless structure, four stone walls and an open doorway. The first expedition had erected it with native help, to store supplies and tools—it made the ship roomier. The *Explorer's* crew had used it similarly, putting in most of their food and the bulky ion-control rings from the reaction drive. Again the natives had lent a willing hand.

There were four guards outside the hut. They were armed only with spears and clubs. It would be easy enough to shoot them down. But before anything could be transferred back to the ship, the entire hive would come swarming, and there weren't that many bullets.

"Let's go talk to them," said Navarro.

"What's the use?" asked Kingsbury. "I've talked to those animated hulks till my larynx needs a retread."

"I have an idea—I want to check on it." Navarro's clumsy suit went skimming over the ashen ground. Kingsbury followed with a mumbled oath.

The nearest guard hefted her spear and swiveled antennae in their direction. Otherwise there was no movement in her. She stood six feet tall,

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broad as a spacesuited man, her exoskeleton shimmering blue, her head featureless except for the glassy eyes. With four three-fingered arms, tightly curled ovipositor, and sliding joints of armor, she looked like a nightmare insect. But she wasn't; a dragonfly or a beetle was man's brother beside this creature of silicone cells and silicate blood and shell of beryllium alloy. Kingsbury thought of her as a kind of robot—well, yes, she was alive, but where did you draw the line between the robot and the animal?

Navarro stopped before her. She waited. None of her sisters moved. It was a disconcerting habit, never to open conversation.

The Basque cleared his throat. "I have come—oh, hell." With his teeth he switched his helmet radio to the band the natives could sense. "I wish to ask again why you deny us permission to use our own food."

The answer crackled in their earphones. "It is the command of the gods."

Kingsbury stood listening to that nonhuman accent and speculating just what sort of religion these entities did have. They had emotions—they must, being alive—but the degree of correspondence to human or Martian feeling was doubtful.

It wasn't strange that they communicated by organically generated FM radio pulses. The atmosphere didn't carry enough sound to make ears worthwhile. But constant submergence in the thoughts of every other Mercurian within ten miles . . . it must do something to the personality. Make the society as a whole more intelligent, perhaps—the natives had readily learned English from the first expedition, while men hadn't yet made sense out of the native language. But there was probably little individual awareness. A sort of ant mind: ants collectively did remarkable things but were hopeless when alone.

Navarro smiled, a meaningless automatic grimace behind his faceplate. "Can you not tell me why the gods have so decreed? You were all friendly enough when my race last visited you. What made the gods change their minds?"

No answer. That probably meant the Twonk didn't know either.

"You could at least let us have back our control rings and enough food for the journey home. I assure you, we would leave at once."

"No." The voice was alike empty of rancor and mercy. "It is required that you die. The next strangers to come will, then, not be forewarned and we can dispose of them too. This land will be shunned."

"If we get desperate enough, we will start fighting you. We will kill many."

"That I—we do not understand. We are letting you die this way because it is easiest. If you fight us, then we shall fight you, and overwhelm you with numbers; so why do you not die without making useless trouble for yourselves?"

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"That isn't in our nature."

"I—we do not know what you mean by 'nature.' Every She, when she has laid as many eggs as she can, goes out to the sun and returns to those which you name gods. Death is a correct termination when there is no further use for the organism."

"Men think differently," said Navarro. "Of course, as a more or less good Catholic, I consider my body only a husk . . . but I still want to keep it as long as possible."

No reply, except for some crackling gibberish. The Mercurians were talking to each other. Weaker overtones made Kingsbury suspect that several Twonks within the hive were joining the discussion—or the stream of consciousness, or whatever you wanted to call the rumination of a semi-collective mind.

"Look here, my friend," said Navarro. "You know our purposes. We want to get certain minerals from you. You have no use for them, and we would pay you well, in tools and machinery you cannot make for yourselves."

"It would be mutually advantageous," agreed the Twonk. "When the first ship came, we considered it an excellent idea. But since then the gods have told us your sort must not be allowed to live."

"*Por Dios!* Why?"

"The gods did not say."

"You serve these gods," said Navarro harshly. "I believe you give them food . . . right? And tools and anything else they want. You obey their least whim. What do *you* gain from them?"

No answer.

"Can we talk to these gods? Maybe we can persuade them—"

"It is forbidden you to see the Living Light." Another conference. "Perhaps you will agree to die and stop bothering us if we tell you the gods are needful to our life. They give us pure metal—"

"Most of which you make into tools for them," snapped Navarro. "We could do the same for you."

"That is a small thing. But the gods are needful to our life. It is the gods who put life into our eggs. Without them no young would be hatched. It is thus necessary that we obey them."

"Cut it out, Juan," snarled Kingsbury. "I've been through this rigmarole a hundred times. It's no use."

Navarro nodded absent-mindedly and trudged off. They switched to a different radio band, one the natives could not "hear," but said nothing for a while.

"Has it ever occurred to you," asked Navarro finally, "that nobody has ever seen a male Mercurian?"

"Sure. They're hermaphrodites."

"That was assumed by the first expedition. An assumption only, of course. They could not vivisect a live Twonk—"

"*I* sure could!"

"—and the old ones all go out on Dayside to die. The only chance for anatomical studies would be to find one which had met a violent end

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here in Twilight, and there was always too much else to do."

"Well, why shouldn't they be hermaphrodites? Oysters are."

"At certain times of the year. But oysters are a low form of life. On Earth, Mars and Venus, the higher one goes on the evolutionary scale, the more sharp the distinction between the sexes."

"All right, maybe their males are very small."

"As with some fish? Possibly. But most improbable. All their eggs are about the same size, you know."

"Who cares?" snorted Kingsbury. "I just want to go home."

"I care. I have a tidy mind. And, too—Earth needs that uranium and thorium. We will never get it unless we can circumvent this religion of theirs, either by persuading the gods or by . . . hm . . . destroying the cult. But to accomplish the latter, we will first have to understand the creed."

They came out on a road of sorts, a narrow track in the shale, stamped out by thousands of years of feet. There were natives working in the fields, and before the hive they could see smiths hammering cold iron and copper into implements. A few young were in sight, unhumanly solemn at their play. None paid any attention to the outworlders.

Navarro pointed to a smith. "It is true what the Twonk said, that the gods supply their metal?"

"Yes," said Kingsbury. "At least, so I've been told, and I do think the Twonks are unable to tell a lie. Being radio-telepathic, y'know, they couldn't lie to each other, so the idea would never occur to them."

"Hm . . . they do not have fire here, not in this sleazy atmosphere. They must have been in a crude neolithic stage until the gods started smelting ores for them. I imagine that could be done with mirrors focusing the Dayside heat on—oh, a mixture of crushed hematite and some reducing material."

"Uh-huh. And the gods get the pick of whatever the Twonks make out of the metal." Kingsbury cleared his throat to spit, remembered he was in a spacesuit, and swallowed. "It's perfectly clear, Juan. There are two intelligent races on Mercury. The Daysiders have set up in business as gods. They don't want humans around because they're afraid we'll spoil their racket and make 'em work for a living."

"Obviously," said Navarro. "The problem is, how to convince the Twonks of this? To do that, we shall first have to study the nature of the Dayside beings."

They mounted a razorback ridge and clapped down glare filters. Before them was the sun.

It burned monstrous on the horizon, a white fury that drowned the stars and leaped back off the withered land. Even here, with shadows lapping his feet and the refrigeration unit at full blast, Kingsbury felt how the heat licked at him.

"God!" he whispered. "How far

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can we go into that blazing hell?"

"Not very far," said Navarro. "We shall have to hope some Twonks died close by. Come!" He broke into long low-gravity bounds, down the slope and out onto the plain.

Squinting through tormented eyes, Kingsbury made out a shimmering pool at the horizon. It spouted as he watched . . . molten lead? With the speed he had and the sharp curvature of the surface, the sun was rising visibly as he ran.

Even here there was life. A crystalline tree squatted near a raw pinnacle, stiff and improbable. A small thing with many legs scuttered away, shell too bright to look at. Basically, Dayside life had the silicate form of Twilight, many of the compounds identical—a common ancestry a billion years ago, when Mercury still had water—but this life was adapted to a heat that made lead run liquid.

"This . . . road . . . goes on," panted Kingsbury. "Must be . . . a graveyard . . . somewhere—"

His skin was prickling now, as charged particles ate in through the armor. His underclothing was limp with sweat. His tongue felt like a swollen lump of wood.

This was farther into Dayside than men had ever gone before. Through the dizziness, he wondered how even a Twonk could survive the trip . . . only, of course, they didn't. The natives had told the first expedition that their old ones went out into the sunlight to die. There'd be no one to bury them, and the shells weren't volatile—

He stumbled over the first one before he knew it. When his gauntlets touched the ground, he yelled. Navarro pulled him up again. There was a dazzle in their helmets, they squinted and gasped with dry lungs and thought they heard their brains sizzling.

Dead Twonks, thousands of them, scattered around like broken machines, empty-eyed, but the light demonic on their carapaces . . . Kingsbury picked one up. Even in Mercurian gravity, it seemed to have oddly little weight. Navarro took another. Its arms and legs flapped horribly as he ran back eastward.

They never remembered that running. After they had fallen on the dark side of the ridge, they must have fainted, for the next memory was of stirring and a slow awareness that they were embracing dead Mercurians.

Kingsbury put his lips to his canteen nozzle and sucked water up the hose. It was nearly scalding, but he had never drained so sweet a draught. Then he lay and shuddered for another long while.

"*Bueno,*" croaked his companion. "We made it."

They sat up and regarded their loot. Both shells had split open down the front, along the line of weakness where the ventral scutes joined. They had expected to find the shriveled remnants of "organic" material, dried flesh and blackened

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tendons and collapsed veins. But there was nothing.

The shells were empty.

It was a long circuitous walk back to the ship. They didn't want any natives to see them. After that there was a wonderful time of sleeping while Antella worked.

They didn't stop to think about the implications until it was too late to think very much at all. Sunrise would occur at the temple in a few hours, and it was quite a ways from here.

Antella's claw-like hands gestured proudly at the shells. "See, I have hinged the front plates so you can get in and out. Your radios are connected to the antennae, though how you expect to talk Mercurian if anyone converses with you, I do not understand. This harness will support the shells around your suits. Naturally, you cannot use the lower arms, but I have wired them into a life-like position."

Kingsbury drew hard on a cigaret. It might be the last one he ever smoked. "Nice work," he said. "Now as for the plan itself, we'll just have to play by ear. We'll get inside the temple with the others, see what we can see, and hope to get out again undamaged. If necessary, we'll shuck these disguises and fight our way back here. Even in spacesuits, we can outrun any Twonk."

Navarro shook his head. "A most forlorn hope," he muttered. "And if we should succeed, do you realize how many xenologists will pour the vials of wrath on our heads for disrupting native culture?"

"That bothers me a lot," snorted Kingsbury.

"I, of course, can claim to be carrying out the historic traditions of my own people," said Navarro blandly. "It was not the Saracens, but the Basques who slew Roland at Roncesvalles."

"Why'd they do that?"

"They didn't like the way Charlemagne was throwing his weight around. Unfortunately, you, my friend, cannot say you are merely preserving your own culture. These Twonks have no scalps to lift."

"Hell," said Kingsbury, "my culture for the past hundred years has been building skyscrapers and bridges. Come on, let's shove."

It was a clumsy business getting into the shells, but once the plates were latched shut and the harness adjusted, it was not too awkward a disguise. The heads could not be turned on their necks when you wore a spacehelmet inside, but Antella had filled the empty eye-sockets with wide-angle lenses. Kingsbury hoped he wouldn't be required to wink, or move all four arms, or waggle the ovipositor, or speak Mercurian; but otherwise, if he was careful, he ought to pass muster.

The humans left the ship and went down the valley, moving with the stiff native stride. Not till they were past the hive did they speak. Kingsbury's belly muscles were taut,

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but none of the autochthones paid him any special heed. It was fortunate that the Mercurians were not given to idle gossip.

Presently he found himself on a broad, smoothly laid road. It ran straight northwest, through a forest of gleaming barrel-shaped plants where the small wildlife of Twilight scuttled off into the dusk. More and more natives joined them, tall solemn figures streaming in from side roads onto the highway. Many were laden with gifts, iron tools and flashing gems and exquisitely wrought stone vessels . . . did the gods drink molten lead out of those? There was no speech on the communication band, only the quiet pulse of currents oscillating in nerves that were silver wires.

Ghostly journey, through a dark chaotic wilderness of rock and crystalline forest, among a swarm of creatures out of dreams. It shocked Kingsbury how small man and man's knowledge were in the illimitable universe.

He switched to the other band and said harshly, "Juan, maybe we are nuts. Even if we get away with it, what can we hope to do? Suppose one of these Twonks pulled a similar stunt in your church —wouldn't that just make you fighting mad?"

"Yes, of course," answered the other man. "Unless by such means the Twonk proved to me that my faith was based on a fraud. Naturally, she would not be able to do so; but assuming for the sake of discussion that she did, my philosophy would come crashing down about my ears. Then I should be quite ready to listen to her."

"But God! How can we imagine these critters think like us?"

"They don't. But that is in our favor, because they are actually more logical than we humans. They have freely admitted that the only reason they obey the gods is that those are essential to fertility."

"Well . . . maybe the gods are!"

"Yes, yes, I am quite sure of it. But I am equally sure that there is nothing supernatural about it. Suppose, for instance, that a dose of sunlight is necessary for reproduction. A class of priestesses may have capitalized on this fact—I am not sure how, given the Mercurian telepathy, but perhaps the priestesses can think on a different band. Now if we can show that the sunlight alone is required, and the priestesses are mere window-dressing, then I am sure the Twonks will get rid of them."

Kingsbury grinned with scant mirth. "And we're supposed to find this out and prove it in one glimpse?"

"This was originally your idea, *amigo*."

"Yeh. Please don't rub it in."

They walked on, silent, thinking of Earth's remote loveliness. An hour passed. It grew hotter, and the western blaze climbed into the sky until you could see the great lens of zodiacal light just above the hills,

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and more natives joined the procession until there were several thousand pouring along the road. Kingsbury and Navarro stayed close together, near the middle of the crowd.

Black against the blinding sky, they saw the temple. It stood on a high ridge, a columned building of red granite, curiously reminiscent of old Egyptian work. A flat roof covered the front half; the rear was open, but walled off from sight.

The pilgrimage moved between basalt statues onto a flagged plaza before the temple. There it halted, motionless as only a non-breathing Mercurian can be. Kingsbury tuned back to the communication band and heard that they were chanting—at least, he supposed the eery whining rise-and-fall of radio pulses was music. He kept his own mouth shut; no one in that entranced collectivity would realize he wasn't joining in.

A line of Mercurians emerged from the colonnade. They must be priestesses or servitors, for there were geometric patterns daubed on their shells. They halted before the worshipers. Gravely, those who bore gifts advanced, bowed down, and laid them at the feet of the clergy. The articles were picked up and carried back into the temple.

Kingsbury sweated and shivered in his spacesuit. What if the ritual included some fancy dance? He hoped Navarro, who had the gun, could break out of his shell fast enough to use it. None of the natives were armed, and a human was a match for any ten Mercurians, but there must be five thousand of them around him.

The glare became a sudden flame. Sunrise! The shadow of the temple fell over the plaza, but Kingsbury narrowed his eyes to slits and still his head ached.

He was dimly aware of the priestesses returning. Their voices twittered, and the chant ended. A hundred Mercurians walked forth, up the stairs and into the doorway. Another hundred and another hundred . . . They were not quite so impassive now. Kingsbury could see that those near him were trembling with excitement.

Now his and Navarro's line was on the move. He saw that one of the priestesses was leading them. They entered between the pillars and went across a room of mosaics and down a hall. At its end were passages leading to a number of roofless courts into which the sunlight fell. His party took one.

The priestess stood aside, and the procession went on in.

Against the radiance, Kingsbury could just see that there was a doorway on the western side and that daises were built into the floor. The Twonks were settling themselves on those, waiting—He switched to the private band: "Juan, what happens now?"

"What do you think?" answered the Basque. His voice shook, but there was a wryness in it. "This is where they breed, isn't it?"

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"If one of 'em makes a pass at me —shall I try to play along?"

"I think there is something against it in Leviticus—nor could you, ah, respond. . . . We shall probably have to run for our lives. But they are all lying down. Find yourself a couch!"

There was a stillness that stretched. The heat blasted and gnawed. Even the Twonks couldn't endure it for very long at a time. Something would have to take place soon, unless—

"Juan! Maybe they're what-you-call-it, virgin birth. Maybe the sun fertilizes them."

"No. Not parthenogenetic. It has not the evolutionary potentiality to produce intelligent life—it does not give variant zygotes. Sunlight is necessary but not sufficient, I think. And I still cannot believe they are true hermaphrodites. Somewhere there must be males."

Almost, Kingsbury jerked. It was a tremendous effort to hold himself rigid, to wait in the shimmering, dazzling devil-dance of light as all the natives were waiting. "I've got it! The gods—*they* are the males!"

"That is clear enough," said Navarro impatiently. "I deduced it hours ago. But if the case is so simple, I am not hopeful. The males can still claim to be a different, superior order of life, as they indeed already do. We shall need a more fundamental discovery to upset this male-worshiping cult."

Navarro's voice snapped off. Flame stood in the doorway.

No . . . the tall lizard-like forms, in burnished coppery scales, wreathed in silvery vapor—they glowed, walking dragons, but they did not burn . . . they advanced, through the doorway and into the courtyard. Their beaks gaped, and the small dark eyes held sun-sparks, and the tails lashed their taloned feet. More and more of them, stalking in, one to a Twonk, and approaching with hands held out.

The males of Mercury . . . Dayside life, charged with the energy from the sun which made new life possible, sweating out pure quicksilver to cool them so they wouldn't fry their mates . . . was it any wonder they were thought divine?

But Judas! It wasn't possible! Male and female had to come from the same race, evolving together—they *couldn't* have arisen separately, one in the hell of Dayside and one in the endless purgatorial dusk of Twilight. The same mothers had to bear them; and yet, and yet, Twonk eggs only brought forth Twonks—

Then—

The knowledge bit home as a dragon neared Kingsbury. The male was hesitating, the lean head wove back and forth . . . an alien smell? A subtle wrongness of posture?

The Mohawk sat up and yelled. The dragon spouted mercury vapor and crouched. Teeth made to shear through rock flashed in the open mouth.

"Juan, I've got it! I know what they are! Let's get back!"

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Navarro was on his feet, fumbling at the belly of his disguise. Latches clicked free, and he scrambled out of it. The nearest dragon leaped. Navarro's gun bucked. The male fell with a hole blown through him . . . so much for the immortal gods, the heavenly showmen. Kingsbury was out of his own shell now. A female lunged at him. He got her around the waist and pitched her into the mob. Whirling, he slugged his way toward the door, Navarro covering his back.

The dragons snapped at them but didn't dare attack. There was a moment of fury, then the humans were out on the plaza. They began running.

"Now we've got to beat them back to the ship," panted Kingsbury.

"More than that," said Navarro. "We must reach safety before they come near enough to call the hive and have us intercepted. I wonder if we can."

"A man might try," said Kingsbury.

The forward port showed some thousands of armed Mercurian females. They ringed in the ship, waiting, too rational to batter with useless clubs at the hull and too angry to depart. There were more of them arriving every minute.

"I wonder—" Antella peered out. He spoke coolly, but his feathers stood erect with tension. "I wonder if they can do worse to us than they have already done. We will starve no faster besieged in here than walking freely around."

"They can get to us if they want to work at it," said Kingsbury. "And I think they do. They could rig up some kind of battering ram—"

Navarro lit his pipe and puffed hard. "It is our task to persuade them otherwise," he said. "Do you believe they will listen?"

Kingsbury went over to the ship's radio and sat down and operated the controls with nervous fingers. "Let's hope so. It's our only chance. Do you want to talk to 'em?"

"Go ahead. You are better with the English language than I. I will perhaps put in an oar."

Kingsbury switched on the speaker and brought his lips to the microphone. "Hello, out there," he said.

His voice cut through the seething of Mercurian tones. It was eldritch how they snapped off all at once. English, clear and grammatical and subtly distorted, answered him:

"What do you wish to say? You have violated the temple. The gods order that you must die."

"The gods would say that," replied Kingsbury. "But they are not gods at all. They want to get rid of us because we can tell you the truth. They've lied and cheated you for I don't know how many centuries."

"Truth, lie, cheat. Those are words we do not know."

"Well . . . uh . . . truth is a correct statement, a statement of what is real. A lie is a statement which is not truth, but made on purpose,

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knowing it to be false. Cheating is . . . well . . . damn it, I wish we had a dictionary along! The gods have lied to you so you would do what they wanted. That's cheating."

"We think we understand," said the toneless voice. "It is a new concept to us, but a possible one. The gods do not speak so we can hear them. They—" conference, presumably recalling what the first expedition had told about radio— "they use a different band. They communicate with us by gestures only. So are you implying that they are not what they claim to be and have made life unnecessarily difficult for us?"

"That's it, pal." Kingsbury still didn't like the Twonks much, but he was grateful they were so quick on the uptake. "Having seen what goes on in the temple, we know what these self-appointed gods are. They're nothing but the males of your own species."

"What does the word 'male' denote?"

"Well—" Kingsbury ground to a halt. Precisely how did you explain it in nickel words when Junior asked where he came from? He gave Navarro a helpless look. The Basque grinned, leaned over the microphone, and gave a simple account.

The female collectivity thought about it for a while, standing in burnished motionlessness, then said with an unaccustomed slowness: "That is logical. We have long observed that certain of the animals go through the same motions of fertilization as we with the gods. But whether you wish to call them gods or males makes no difference. They are still the great ones who give life."

"They don't give any more life than you do," snapped Kingsbury. "They need you just as much as you need them. In fact . . . *they are yourselves!*"

"That is an irrational statement." Was there a defensive overtone in the voice? "Our eggs bring forth only females, so it is reasonable to suppose that the gods are born directly of the sun. A Mercurian hatches from an egg after the godmale has given life. She grows up and in her turn visits the godmales and brings forth eggs. At last, grown old, she goes to the sunlands and dies. There is no missing period in which she could become a godmale."

"Oh, yeah? What about after she's gone sunside?"

Mercurian language gabbled at them.

Kingsbury spoke fast: "We went out there ourselves and found the shells of those you thought had died. But the shells were empty! You know you have muscles, nerves, guts, organs. Those ought to remain in a dried-out condition. But I repeat, the shells were empty!"

"Then . . . but we have only your statement."

"You can check up on it. We can rebuild a spacesuit for one of you, furnish enough protection from the

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sun for you to go out there a while, long enough to see."

"But what happens? What is the significance of the empty shells?"

"Isn't it obvious, you dunderheads? You're a kind of larval stage. At the proper time, you go out into the sun. Its radiation changes you. You're changed so much that all memory of your past state disappears—your whole bodies have to be reconstructed, to live on Dayside. But when the process is finished, you break out of the shell . . . and now you're male.

"*You* don't know that. The male comes out as if newly born—hatched, I mean. Probably his kind meet him and help him and teach him. The males discovered the truth somehow . . . well, it was easy enough for them, since they can watch the whole life cycle. Instead of helping you females, as nature intended, they set themselves up as gods and lived off you, taking more than they gave. And when they learned about us, they forbade you to have dealings with us—because they were afraid we'd learn the truth and expose them.

"But they need you! All you have to do is refuse to visit the temples for a few sunrises. Then see how fast they come to terms!"

"Lysistrata," murmured Navarro.

For a time, then, the radio hissed and crackled with the thinking of many minds linked into one. Antella sat unmoving, Navarro fumbled with his pipe, Kingsbury gnawed his lips and drummed on the radio panel.

Finally: "This is astonishing news. We must investigate. You will provide one of us with a suit in which to inspect Dayside."

"Easy enough," said Kingsbury. His tone jittered. "And if you find the shells really are empty, as you will—what then?"

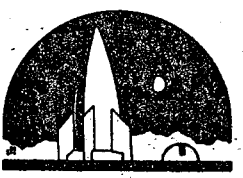
"We shall follow your advice. You will be given admittance to your supplies, and we will discuss arrangements for the mining of those ores which you desire."

Navarro found himself uncontrollably shaking. "Saint Nicholas, patron of wanderers," he whispered, "I will build you a shrine for this."

"The males may make trouble," warned Antella.

"If their nature is as you claim," said the Twonk horde, "they will not be difficult to control."

Kingsbury, the American, wondered if he had planted the seeds of another matriarchy. Underneath all the rejoicing, he felt a vague sense of guilt.



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I've often referred to Ellery Queen's Mystery Magazine *as our sister publication. It's now evident that the sistership is virtually Siamese: we share much of the same bloodstream. Winners in EQMM's recently concluded Twelfth Annual Contest include Poul Anderson, Robert Bloch, Miriam Allen deFord, G. C. Edmondson and Manly Wade Wellman, along with a half dozen less frequent F&SF contributors; and the winner of the $1500 First Prize was Avram Davidson. In introducing Davidson's fine* The Necessity of His Condition *(EQMM, April, 1957), Queen writes, "He has the astonishing knack of being able to write about any geographical background, and about any culture, ancient or modern, alien or native—and always with the most startling authenticity." I concur wholeheartedly: Davidson's EQMM winner is about the* ante bellum *South; his last F&SF story was about Hanoverian England; and each, one would think, could have been written only by an intensive specialist. Nor is Davidson's ability to get under the skin of a culture limited to the long-ago and far-away; this new story, brief but sharply limned, could give an alien anthropologist a valuable insight into the mores of prosperous middle-class Southern California.*

Summerland

by **AVRAM DAVIDSON**

MARY KING SAID—AND I'M SURE IT was true—that she couldn't remember a thing about the séance at Mrs. Porteous's. Of course no one tried to refresh her memory. Mary is a large woman, with a handsome, ruddy face, and the sound of that heavy body hitting the floor and the sight of her face at that moment—it was gray and loose-mouthed and flaccid—so unnerved me that I am ashamed to say I just sat there, numb. Others scurried around and cried for water or thrust cushions under her head or waved vials of ammoniated lavender in front of her, but I just sat frozen, looking at her, looking at Mrs. Porteous lolling back in the armchair, Charley King's voice still ringing in my ears,

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and my heart thudding with shock.

I would not have thought, nor would anyone else, at first impression, that the Kings were the séance type. My natural tendency is to associate that sort of thing with wheat germ and vegeburgers and complete syndromes of psychosomatic illnesses, but Charley and his wife were beef-eaters all the way and they shone with health and cheer and never reported a sniffle. Be exceedingly wary of categories, I told myself; despise no man's madness. Their hearty goodwill, if it palled upon me, was certainly better for my mother than another neighbor's whining or gossip would have been. The Kings, who were her° best friends, devoted to her about 500% of the time I myself was willing to give. For years I had lived away from home, our interests and activities were too different, there seemed little either of us could do when long silences fell upon us as we sat alone. It was much better to join the Kings.

"Funny thing happened down at the office today—" Charley often began like that. Ordinarily this opening would have shaken me into thoughts of a quick escape. Somehow, though, as Charley told it, his fingers rippling the thick, iron-gray hair, his ruddy face quivering not to release a smile or laugh before the point of the story was revealed —somehow, it *did* seem funny when Charley told it. To me, the Kings were older people, but they were younger than my mother, and I am sure they helped keep her from growing old too fast. It was worth it to me to eat vast helpings of butter-pecan ice cream when the Real Me hungered and slavered for a glass of beer with pretzel sticks on the side.

If tarot cards, Rosicrucian literature, séances, and milder non-contortionistic exercises made an incongruous note in the middle-class, middle-aged atmosphere the Kings trailed with them like "rays of lambent dullness"—why, it was harmless. It was better to lap up pyramidology than lunatic-fringe politics. Rather let Mother join hands on the ouija board than start cruising the Great Circle of quack doctors to find a cure for imaginary backaches. So I ate baked alaska and discussed the I Am and astral projection, and said "Be still, my soul" to inner yearnings for highballs and carnal conversation. After all, it was only once a week. And I never saw any signs that my mother took any of it more seriously than the parchesi game which followed the pistachio or peanut-crunch.

I am an architect. Charley was In The Real Estate Game. A good chance, you might think, for one hand to wash the other, but it hardly ever happened that our commercial paths crossed. Lanais, kidney-shaped swimming pools, picture windows, copper-hooded fireplaces, hi-fi sets in the walls—that was my sort of thing. "Income property"—

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that was Charley's. And a nice income it was, too. Much better than mine.

How does that go?—Evil communications corrupt good manners? —Charley might have said something of that sort if I'd ever told him what Ed Hokinson told me. Hoke is on the planning commission, so what with this and that, we see each other fairly often. Coincidence's arm didn't stretch too long before Charley King's name came up between us. Idly talking, I repeated to Hoke a typical Charley-ism. Charley had been having tenant trouble.

"Of course there are always what you might call the Inescapable Workings of Fate, which all of us are subject to, just as we are to, oh, say, the Law of Supply and Demand," said Charley, getting outside some dessert. "But by and large whatever troubles people of that sort"—meaning the tenants—"think they have, it's due to their own improvidence, for they won't save, and each week or month the rent comes as a fresh surprise. And then you have certain politicians stirring them up and making them think they're badly off when really they're just the victims of Maya, or Illusion." Little flecks of whipped cream were on his ruddy jowels. Mary nodded solemnly, two hundred pounds of well-fed, well-dressed, well-housed approbation.

"Maya," said Hoke. "That what he calls it? Like to come with me and see for yourself? *I* know Charley King," Hoke said. In the end I did go. Interesting, in its own way, what I saw, but not my kind of thing at all. And the next day was the day Charley died. He was interred with much ceremony and expense in a fabulous City of the Dead, which has been too well described by British novelists for me to try. Big, jolly, handsome, life-loving Mr. Charley King. In a way, I missed him. And after that, of course, Mary and my mother were together even more. After that there was even less of the Akashic Documents or Anthroposophism or Vedanta, and more and more of séances.

"*I* know I have no cause to grieve," Mary said. "*I* know that Charley is happy. I just want *him* to *tell* me so. That's not asking too much, is it?"

How should I know? What is "too much"? I never do any asking, myself, or any answering for that matter.

So off they went, my mother and Mrs. Mary King, and—if I couldn't beg off—I. Mrs. Victory's, Mrs. Reverend Ella Maybelle Snyder's, Madame Sophia's, Mother Honeywell's —every spirit-trumpet in the city must have been on time-and-a-half those days. They got little-girl angels and old-lady angels. They got doctors, lawyers, Indian chiefs, and young boy-babies—they must even have gotten Radio Andorra—but they didn't get Charley. There were

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slate-messages and automatic writings and ectoplasm enough to reach from here to Punxatawney, P. A., but if it reached to Charley he didn't reach back. All the mediums and all their customers had the same line: There is no grief in Summerland, there is no pain in Summerland—Summerland being the choice real estate development Upstairs, at least in the Spiritualist hep-talk. They all *believed* it, but somehow they all wanted to be assured. And after the séance, when all the spooks had gone back to Summerland, *what* a consumption of coffee, cupcakes, and cold cuts.

Some of the places were fancy, you bought "subscription" for the season's performance and discussed parapsychology over canapés and sherry. Mrs. Porteous' place, however, was right out of the 1920's, red velveteen por*teers* on wooden rings, and all. I almost fancied I could feel the ectoplasm when we came in, but it was just a heavy condensation of boiled cabbage steam and hamburger smoke.

Mrs. Porteous looked like a caricature of herself—down-at-hem evening gown, gaudy but clumsy cosmetic job, huge rings on each finger, and, *oh,* that *voice*. Mrs. Porteous was the phoniest-looking, phoniest-sounding, phoniest-*acting* medium I have ever come across. She had a lady-in-waiting: sagging cheeks, jet-black page-boy bob or bangs or whatever you call it, velvet tunic, so on.

"Dear friends," says the gentlewoman, striking a Woolworth gong, "might I have your attention please. I shall now request that there be no further smoking or talking whilst the séance is going on. We guarantee—*nothing*. We shall attempt—*all*. If there is doubt—if there is discord—the spirits may not come. For there is no doubt, no discord, there is no grief nor pain, in Summerland." So on. Let us join our hands . . . let us bow our heads . . . I, of course, peeked. The Duchess was sitting on the starboard side of the incense, next to Mrs. Porteous, who was rolling her eyes and muttering. Then Charley King screamed.

It was Mrs. Porteous' mouth that it came from, it was her chest that heaved, but it was Charley King's voice—I know his voice, don't you think I know his voice? He screamed. My mother's hand jerked away from mine.

"The fire! The fire! Oh, Mary, how it burns, how—!"

Then Mary fell forward from her seat, the lights went on, went off, then on again, everyone scurried around except me—I was frozen to my seat—and Mrs. Porteous—she lay back in her arm chair. Finally I got to my feet and somehow we managed to lift Mary onto a couch. The color came back to her face and she opened her eyes.

"That's all right, dear," my mother said.

"Oh my goodness!" said Mary. "What happened? Did I faint? Isn't

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that silly. No, no, let me get up; we must start the séance."

Someone tugged at my sleeve. It was the Duchess.

"Who was that?" she asked, looking at me shrewdly. "It was her husband, wasn't it? Oh-yes-it-twas! He was burned to death, wasn't he? And he hasn't yet freed himself from his earthly ties so he can enter Summerland. He must of been a skeptic."

"He didn't burn to death," I said. "He fell and broke his neck. And he wasn't a skeptic."

(Hoke had said to me: "Of course the board was rotten; the whole house was rotten. All his property was like that. It should have been condemned years ago. No repairs, a family in each room, and the rent sky-high—he must have been making a fortune. You saw those rats, didn't you?" Hoke had asked. "Do you know what the death rate is in those buildings?")

The Duchess shook her head. Her face was puzzled.

"Then it couldn't of been her husband," she said. "There is no pain," she pointed out reasonably, "in Summerland."

"No," I said to her. "No, I'm sure there isn't. I know that."

But I knew Charley King. And I know his voice.

Coming Next Month

Very rare, in recent years, have been any Heinlein stories short of book-length novels; but next month we'll have the pleasure of presenting a new short novelet by Robert A. Heinlein, *The Menace from Earth*—a charming story of young love and a wonderfully detailed picture, in the inimitable Heinlein manner, of civilization on the Moon. The same issue, on the stands around July 1, will feature a short novel, *The Lineman,* by Walter M. Miller, Jr., who proves himself a very different writer from the creator of the canticles of St. Leibowitz in this harshly realistic and bitterly violent story of work and sex on Mars. Other stories (all new—no reprints) include a bittersweet fantasy of childhood by Mildred Clingerman, the first F&SF appearance of Old Pro Rog Phillips, and a dream-satire by mystery novelist and TV-writer Stuart Palmer.

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The Literate Monster

by WILLIAM CHAPMAN WHITE

IF SCIENCE KEEPS ON CONQUERING the unconquerable there just isn't going to be anything left for the human race to do. The news out of England, sent round the world by Reuters, shows to what ends science will reach.

Scientists at Manchester University, so the story says, have built an electronic computer into which a scattered collection of words can be fed. Deep down in the brain of the machine the words are put together and rearranged into complete sentences which are then poured out in legible form. The mere rumor of the existence of such a machine ought to strike terror into the hearts of the writers of radio and television serials, one-a-year novelists, and even columnists.

With the story of the machine's invention comes a sample of the machine's work. One of the inventors, obviously tongue-tied in the presence of his beloved, decided to feed into the machine a whole series of endearing words, in the hope that the machine would grunt and grumble and give out with a love letter. Sure enough, it did. Presumably that inventor sent it off at once to his girl.

Its text, verbatim, was: "Darling sweetheart, you are my avid fellow feeling. My affection curiously clings to your passionate wish. My liking yearns for your heart. You are my wistful sympathy, my tender liking. Yours beautifully."

If the girl fell for that and married the man she got what she deserved. Without the machine handy, the inventor is still tongue-tied. Breakfast conversation in that newly wed couple's home must be odd at times.

"I certainly don't understand you, Cecil," says the wife. "You used to write me such beautiful things before we were married and now you never say a word."

Cecil just stares, wordless and helpless.

"If you don't want to show me any avid fellow feeling any more," says the unhappy bride, "you might at least show me some wistful sympathy."

In the meantime Cecil and his friends, having solved the problem of writing love letters, are now busily working on a new machine that will carry on the rest of the courtship and let a man free for more important things, like inventing more such machines.

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Miss Seabright, who usually scries into the future, this time casts her sensitive gaze upon the past, to bring us a bittersweet and touching fantasy of a Victorian wife who was offered an unexpected way out of the fetters of conventional propriety.

Eithne

by IDRIS SEABRIGHT

WHEN EITHNE'S CARRYING A CHILD began to be noticeable, Herbert sent her away from Corstophine, their villa, to Wracksand, a little hamlet on the North coast. He said he did it because the air at Corstophine was too heavy for a female in her condition, and it was true, the air at Corstophine was always dark with smoke and sharp with sulphur from the mills. But Eithne thought he was sending her away because he was ashamed of her.

She did not much mind. Her maid was traveling with her, and Herbert, parting from her at the station, had put a generous number of ten pound notes in her reticule. Besides, though the obsessive grip of his dark, shamefaced feeling for her had begun to relax a little in the last month, she was still easier away from him. She was supposed to return to Corstophine for her confinement. Herbert had engaged a medical man in the neighborhood to attend her. Dr. Trevin was a modern practitioner, well thought-of, up-to-date in his methods. He would give her chloroform when her pains got bad. The Queen had had chloroform in 1853 when Prince Leopold was born.

When Eithne and her companion got to Wracksand, there turned out to be no suitable place for Dawkins, the maid, to stay. Eithne bore her complaints patiently for perhaps fifteen minutes. Then—her temper was uncertain these days; sometimes she was happy at her condition, sometimes fiercely resentful of it—she told the woman abruptly to go back to Corstophine. Eithne could get along quite well with nobody but Mrs. Neville, her landlady, to attend her. She had liked Mrs. Neville on sight.

Dawkins left, sulky and hysterical. When Eithne had had time to rest a little from her journey, Mrs. Neville suggested that she might like to walk down to the sea and sit in the sun. Though it was October, it was

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a fine warm day, and a little exercise was good for a woman who was carrying.

Eithne was pleased. She got Matthew Arnold's latest volume of poems from her valise—she liked poetry, though Herbert didn't—and started toward the water. The coast at Wracksand was rocky, but Mrs. Neville's directions had been careful. Eithne had no difficulty in finding the little sandy beach, enclosed between two jutting spits of rock.

The sun was warm. Eithne did not open her book. She sat with her hands loosely about her knees, thinking languidly of Herbert . . . Corstophine . . . Dawkins . . . Herbert again. Herbert talked so much of duty. It was, she supposed, her duty to have the baby. At any rate, she was having it.

How warm the sun was! Suddenly Eithne felt like a prisoner within the heavy black serge of her dress. She stood up. Mrs. Neville had said that nobody ever came to the beach, not even fishermen. With eager, guilty fingers Eithne began to unbutton the buttons—the dozens of buttons—on her bodice. She pulled the dress off over her shoulders, thinking: how heavy, heavier even than the child I'm carrying. And her underclothing, stiff with handmade lace and much embroidery, was heavy too.

She stood naked at last. She looked about herself anxiously, but, no, nobody ever came here. The waves that broke on the little beach were white with foam, but the water itself was a tender dark gray-blue. Her eyes half-shut against the shameful sight of her own body, she waded hesitantly out until she stood in water over her knees.

She had never been in the sea before without a bathing-dress. The water was cold, but there was something delicious in its very iciness. Hastily she knelt, and sluiced the next waves over her shoulders and her breasts. Oh! Oh! How cold, how sweet! Then she hurried back to the pile of clothing she had left on the sand.

She had nothing to dry on. The air dried her, and left a prickle of salt on her skin. She got into her clothing again, finding that she resented its weight less now that she had been out of it.

She was almost done with the buttons on the heavy black bodice when she saw, far out beyond the jutting rocks, forty yards or so from the shore, a cluster of bobbing heads. For a moment shame froze her. Then she laughed. Seals, only seals. It didn't matter if they had been watching her.

When she got back to the cottage Mrs. Neville was preparing a meal, something between an early supper and a late tea. "Was it pleasant by the water, ma'am?" she asked as she scalded out the teapot.

"Very pleasant," Eithne answered. "The sun was nicely warm. Oh, and I saw some seals."

"Seals!" Mrs. Neville set the

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brown-glazed teapot down with a thump. "Fancy that! Excuse me for asking, ma'am, but are you quite sure? There haven't been seals at Wracksand since my grandmother's day, thirty or forty years ago."

"Quite sure," Eithne answered. "I saw their heads, you know. Round, dark heads."

"Yes. . . . Well, I'm glad to hear they are back. The people of the sea —that's what folk in these parts call them, ma'am—are lucky. Fancy their coming back, after all these years!"

"I suppose it was the seal fishers drove them away?" Eithne asked, sinking down in the chair Mrs. Neville had pulled out for her.

"So some say. My grandmother always held it was the wickedness of folk nowadays that made them leave. She said it wasn't natural to dig the earth for iron and coal. And oh, she thought it dreadful to make the little ones work so hard beside the looms in the cruel cotton factories. The dogs, she used to say, were better off than many an English child."

"That's progress," Eithne said, echoing Herbert. "We have to have progress."

"Progress!" Mrs. Neville's dark eyes flashed. "Nay, but it's wickedness! . . . Excuse me, ma'am. Eat your supper, do. There's a fresh hearth-baked loaf for you, and sweet butter from Mrs. May's churning. A bit of lettuce from the garden. And I boiled two of the speckled eggs. They're the tasty ones."

Eithne buttered a slice of the crumbly warm bread and began to pour herself a cup of tea. "Put lots of milk to your tea, ma'am," Mrs. Neville advised her. "Milk's the staff of life to a childing woman."

When she undressed for bed that night, Eithne touched her tongue to her wrist. She laughed to find she could still taste salt on it.

The weather held on fine, and Eithne went every day to the little beach. She took her lunch with her —eggs or cheese, slices of brown loaf, and milk in a flask—in a little wicker basket, and stayed until the sun was low and it began to grow chill. She sat with her hands in her lap, not thinking, watching the waves eternally washing against the sand. She often saw the heads of seals, sometimes far out, sometimes so near that she could have tossed a pebble out to them.

She wrote to Herbert weekly, and got letters as often from him. Business was good, he wrote, he missed her. There had been an accident at the mills; two workingmen had been badly scalded when one of the vats that held the molten steel broke. Nothing serious. The firm had two new contracts. He would send Dawkins to fetch her back to Corstophine at the middle of January. He had told the maid to use her time in making dresses for Eithne's child.

Eithne crumpled up the letters from Herbert as soon as she read them, and tossed them in the fireplace. She disliked thinking about

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Corstophine, Herbert, the mills. She was impatient to get back to the beach and forget them.

She longed to undress again and let the wonderful cold sea water caress her. No, it might be bad for the child. But the nagging backache that had troubled her so at Corstophine had left her. Her body felt relaxed and sound.

Toward the end of November the long spell of fine weather broke. It rained hard; day after day there was driving wind or choking fog. Eithne had to stay in the house by the fire. She tried crocheting, but she had never cared for fancy work. She was always laying the hook down and yawning. She preferred to help Mrs. Neville with the household tasks, or to listen to the older woman talk.

At first Mrs. Neville talked of the people of the village: of Parson, who was a good man, and so learned that he could read books in those old hard languages; of Mrs. May, who kept two cows and had been midwife to Mrs. Neville when she had had her own children; of Billy Atkins, who had run away to sea, and of Norah Pollock, who had run off to London and come to no good end, and of a host of others who had lived in the village, fished or farmed there, and died where they had been born.

Then, when she grew more at ease with Eithne, she began to tell her the stories her own mother had told her. Fairy stories, Eithne supposed one would call them. She told of brownies and sea fairies, of the Good Neighbors, who Eithne gathered were land spirits, of hags and demons, of the people of the sea, and of the paths that lead to fairyland. Eithne listened with drowsy pleasure. Sometimes Mrs. Neville would interrupt herself to say with a laugh that Parson liked her to tell the old stories, and she supposed she had got into the way of telling them to the quality.

At last, after nearly three weeks of bad weather, the sky cleared. Mrs. Neville bundled Eithne up in layer on layer of woolen shawls, and sent her out to take the air. Eithne walked down to the beach.

The sun's rays were weak, but he rode in a sky of pale, unclouded blue. The water today was choppy, vexed by cross-currents, but from every broken pale blue surface there was reflected a dazzle of light. Eithne sat down in the sun, out of the wind. The light on the water hurt her eyes. She dozed.

She woke with a start. What had she been dreaming? Some nonsense, out of the stories Mrs. Neville had been telling her—something about the two paths that human beings took, the hard road to heaven and the broad pleasant road to hell, and the third path, the pretty winding path that leads to fairyland.

Nonsense. But suppose it were true. Suppose that, besides the two known ways, there were a third one, the road to fairyland? Nonsense. Nonsense. There was only one path

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to be taken, the path of duty—Herbert spoke so much of duty—and Eithne's next duty was returning to Corstophine to have her child.

Eithne felt a throb of hatred toward Corstophine. The rooms were too large, always cold, dank with the raw smell of new plaster. The servants were obsequious and attentive, but they had spiteful eyes. Even the garden, that might have given her pleasure, had been frozen by topiary work and formal parterres into a rigid, distasteful lesson in geometry. And Dr. Trevin—how could she expose her travailing body to his cold scrutiny? He was a formal, dry little man with sharp manners. For all his modernity and his neat pince-nez, she disliked him and was afraid of him.

Oh, but she had to. It was her duty.—Why shouldn't she stay in Wracksand and have her baby *here?*

Eithne knotted her fingers together. She felt giddy with excitement. Was it really so foolish? Mrs. May was a clever midwife; Mrs. Neville said that she had saved the life of a woman in Pawlish that two doctors had given up. And Mrs. Neville herself was so kind. She treated Eithne like a daughter. Eithne felt safe and happy with her. It would be easy to have a baby here.

Herbert would be furious. He was a choleric man; Eithne had seen him, in moments of exasperation, actually gnashing his teeth. But though he might send Dawkins to fetch her back to Corstophine, Dawkins was only a servant. Dawkins could not compel her. And Herbert himself was much too fond of his dignity to make himself ridiculous by attempting to coerce a woman in the last stages of pregnancy. There were some advantages in being a woman, after all. No. She would stay here. She would write to Herbert tonight.

When she got back to the cottage, she told Mrs. Neville what she had decided. "I'm so glad," the older woman said. Her eyes glowed. "Just fancy, a baby in the house again! It will be like old times.

"I'm sure you won't regret it, my dear. There never was a better midwife than Mrs. May. Folk in the village say she's kin to the Good Neighbors, she's so wise. And I can help you get things ready for the little one. I've still got baby clothes put away in my old dresser. After you drink your tea, we'll have a look."

Herbert's answer, when it came, was even angrier than Eithne had feared. She was, he wrote, making him look like a fool. And she was a fool herself, to trust herself to ignorant old women at such a *dangerous* moment of her life. Had she no conception of the trouble he had gone to on her account? He had put himself out to make *suitable* arrangements for her; for a momentary whim, a wild, unregulated fancy, she was willing to upset everything. She had never had the proper views of what duty in a wife meant. And so on for three pages.

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His letter, however, ended on a note of acquiescence, as Eithne had foreseen it would. She fancied he might be secretly relieved at being spared the discomfort and inconvenience of having her confined at Corstophine. She only hoped he would not make her pay for the affront to his dignity when she did go back.

Eithne's child was due at the end of January. Just before bedtime on the night of the twenty-eighth she called Mrs. Neville, saying she thought her pains had begun.

Mrs. Neville went for Mrs. May at once. Eithne, left alone in the little cottage with only the oil lamp for company, gave way to a moment of terrible fear. Herbert was right, she was a fool. Women died in childbed, even when they had good doctors. She had put her life into the hands of two ignorant old women. Mrs. Neville could not even read. What a fool she had been! She was almost groaning with fear when Mrs. Neville and the midwife came back.

Mrs. May gave her a long, searching look: Then she smiled. "Take off your things, my dear," she said. "We want to wash you. And then, if you have a short, loose nightdress, put it on. Better no nightdress at all, if you're warm enough."

Clumsily Eithne stood up. She was shaking with fear. A contraction bent her almost double. Mrs. May put her arms around her shoulders to support her.

"Nay, you're doing it wrong," she said. "You mustn't try to help it yet, my dear. And don't be afraid. It's natural. You must just open to it, like a door."

Eithne was undressed and washed. Mrs. May sat beside her, holding her hand and talking quietly. Gradually Eithne's fear abated. Herbert had been wrong, after all, and she right. Mrs. May might be ignorant of more than her ABC's. But she was wise.

About ten o'clock Mrs. May said, "Draw a deep breath and hold it, my dear. There. Do you feel like bearing down a bit?"

Eithne tried. "Why, that's better," she said, surprised.

"Yes, now you can help." Mrs. May smiled. "And scream if you've a mind to, dear. Some women do."

The contractions were coming faster. Eithne shook her head. She couldn't spare breath to tell Mrs. May the surprising thing she had just discovered. But the truth was that it was not really pain.

The baby was born a little after one o'clock. Eithne, looking up into Mrs. May's face, saw a strange expression, like wind blowing over water, pass across it. "Is it all right?" she asked anxiously.

"Yes. It's a girl. A perfect, beautiful little girl."

The afterbirth had come. Eithne held out her tired arms. "Give her to me," she said.

She was astonished at how much she enjoyed motherhood. The baby's

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tininess and physical perfection enchanted her. She never wanted to let the little thing out of her arms. She had been afraid she would not be able to suckle her daughter, since her breasts were small, but Mrs. Neville encouraged her, saying size went for naught in a matter like that. Eithne tried, and was filled with delicious pride when the baby throve. The only cloud on her happiness was the knowledge that she would soon have to return to Corstophine.

She had written to Herbert a few days after her confinement, telling him the news. He waited almost two weeks to answer, and his letter, when it came, was short and cold, expressing regret for the child's sex. He said nothing about Eithne's returning to the villa. Yet Eithne knew that she would have to return.

The weather stayed bad until early in March. Then it cleared. There was a feel of spring in the air. Eithne went down to the beach with the baby.

She had her lunch and then, since little Una seemed hungry, gave her the breast. She leaned against a rock, drowsy with the relaxation of suckling, thinking of the story Mrs. Neville had told her last night—of how some seals are nothing but seals, and how others are the true People of the Sea, powerful beings who can doff their furry skins at will and go among land people in the human shape. Their number is always the same, and if one of them dies his skin must be given to another. The seals are their loved flocks, and they care for them tenderly.

The baby sank back from the breast, satisfied. Eithne buttoned up her bodice. She looked out over the water. There were no seals at all today. Wait, though. Far out, almost farther than she could see, there was one head.

There was a crunch of footsteps over the sand. Eithne turned, startled. A man was coming toward her around one of the points of rock.

He wore corduroy trousers and a jersey, and there was a fishnet over his shoulders. He must be a fisher, though Eithne, who thought she knew every face in the village by now, didn't recognize him.

"Good day, missis," he said when he got nearer.

"Good day," Eithne replied sedately. She wasn't alarmed, though Mrs. Neville had said nobody ever came to the beach. He had a gentle look.

When he got up to them, the baby murmured and crowed. He smiled. "So you've a little one!" he said, as if pleased. "Missis, could I have a look at her?"

Eithne frowned a little. There was a strong, sharp smell of the sea about him. But she was so proud of her baby, she couldn't resist the temptation. "Yes, if you like," she said.

He sank down beside them on his heels in the sand. Very gently he put out a finger and touched the baby's flushed cheek. Her blue eyes opened

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at the contact. She began to gurgle and smile.

"A beautiful baby," he said. He was looking at little Una intently. "Yes, missis, a beautiful child."

"Thank you," Eithne answered. She was hoping he would not ask to hold the baby. She did not want to entrust her child to a strange man.

He got to his feet. "I am glad you let me see her," he said. "Good day, missis." He walked off around the other point of rock.

Eithne gazed after him. She knew she had never seen him before, and yet she was troubled by a haunting sense of familiarity in his bearing. After a moment she placed it. It was Mrs. May he resembled. He looked enough like her to be, not her brother, but her cousin. Perhaps he was. In a small village, it was likely enough.

Three days later Herbert, quite unexpectedly, came to Wracksand.

Eithne was just finishing her breakfast when he knocked at the cottage door. When she saw who it was, she felt the blood leaving her face. Had he come to take her . . . home, back to Corstophine?

He embraced her, saying, "Good morning, my dear," and then looked around the little cottage disparagingly. "I wish to talk to you," he said. "Is there not some spot where we can be by ourselves?"

Mrs. Neville was peering at them. Eithne was loath to take him to the little beach, where she had spent so many peaceful hours, but she knew of nowhere else. She picked up little Una and unwillingly led him down to the shore.

They sat down in the sand. He fumbled in his pocket and brought out a book. "It is a gift I purchased for you," he said.

Eithne unwrapped the parcel. It was a book of poetry, the same book of Matthew Arnold's, in fact, that she already had. Still, he had meant it kindly. "Thank you, Herbert," she said.

"Yes . . . When I saw it, I thought of you." He turned over the pages. When he came to "Dover Beach" he began to read the poem aloud haltingly. "*'. . . Ah, love, let us be true /To one another!'*" he read. "*'For the world, which seems/ To lie before us like a land of dreams,/So various, so beautiful, so new,/Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,/Nor certitude . . .'*"

He closed the book. Eithne waited. "I am beginning to think," he said slowly, "that I have not given enough . . . heed to love. There are other things in life besides duty. Yes."

Eithne listened in cold surprise. She had been gone from Corstophine a long time—more than five months, in fact. Was Herbert trying to tell her that he had become interested in another woman? Or was this but the prelude to more of the dark, obsessive desire with which he had always regarded her person?

What did it matter? What did she care? Now that she was face to face

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with him again, she realized that the spark of feeling she had had toward him at the time of their marriage had died utterly. She was sorry. He had brought her the poetry book. But he was less to her than the seals out yonder in the water were.

The baby stirred and woke. She gave a hungry wail. Eithne undid her dress and began to nurse her.

Herbert looked on. His lips had parted and a shine had come into his eyes. Eithne, meeting his glance, felt the blood rising hotly in her cheeks. No. No. She *would* not. But he was her husband. In the end, she would.

When the feeding was finished, he said, "You spoil the child. Must you put her to the breast the moment she cries? Even a baby must learn to recognize duty and discipline."

"She was hungry," Eithne defended feebly.

"She can learn to wait." He cleared his throat. "There is another thing. She must be baptized. I have always thought, Eithne, that perhaps your own lack of proper awareness of a wife's duties comes from your not having been baptized until so late in life. I have already selected her godparents. And I have chosen her name too. She will be called Mary Gertrude."

"I call her Una," Eithne said sullenly.

"It is not a suitable name.—Eithne, you must return to Corstophine."

Eithne's eyes moved. "I . . . I am not yet well enough."

"Perhaps. But I have consulted Dr. Trevin. He informs me that you will be quite well enough to resume your duties at the end of another week."

What did he know about it? Eithne thought passionately. Duties! Duties! And Herbert's cold, abrupt lust in the dark. He talked of love. How she hated . . . But when he got up from the beach with an air of finality, brushing the sand from his knees, she rose obediently and followed him.

She told her landlady she would be leaving on Wednesday week. Mrs. Neville nodded, but said nothing. Eithne was grateful that she made no comment. She couldn't have borne to talk about her going back.

For the next few days Eithne rose early and went down to the beach as soon as she had eaten. She sat all day looking out expectantly over the water. She seemed to be waiting for something—she didn't know what—that became more unlikely with the passing of every hour. Sometimes she would become conscious of how tensely she was waiting, and force herself to relax. But always in the next moment she would be sitting upright again, looking out eagerly at the seals' heads and the light on the waves.

Except for her tense waiting, she felt perfectly calm. Now that her return to Corstophine was so near, it aroused no emotion in her.

Tuesday came. Dawkins would be at Wracksand tomorrow. Eithne went to the beach early, but about

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three in the afternoon she felt a sudden impatience. She would wait no longer. It was silly to wait when she didn't even know what she was waiting for.

She packed the things back in the lunch basket and picked up her baby. Una—Mary Gertrude—gave a sudden wail. Her small face was puckered with rage. She had been fretful and fractious, crying at everything, for the last few days, though she had been such a good baby before.

Eithne sat down again and tried to comfort her. She was still rocking the child and singing when she heard a step on the sand.

It was the fisherman. He was carrying something dark, that looked like fur, over his shoulders. The net he had carried before was gone.

Eithne got to her feet. The baby had hushed its crying. She said, "It was you I was waiting for. But I didn't think you'd come."

"Oh, yes. You were right, you see, when you thought there was another path."

"Besides the two human ones? What's it like, underwave?"

"Cool, green and sliding," he answered her with a smile. "Better than words."

"Better than Mrs. Neville told me?"

"Yes, better than her words."

She let out a long breath. Little Una stirred. "I can't leave my baby," Eithne said.

"Give her to me. Mrs. May said she had the signs."

He took the child from Eithne's arms and walked out into the water with her. Eithne, looking on, felt a moment of the same terrible fear she had experienced on the baby's birthnight. Una would drown, she had been mad to trust her to a stranger, she—Then her mind steadied and she knew, as she had known on the night of her confinement, that it was all right. When the fisherman came back to her, she was sitting quietly in the sand.

He gave her the baby and sat down beside her. Salt water was dripping from little Una's clothes and hair. But her cheeks were pink, and when Eithne cuddled her to her, she gave a crow of delight.

"She can live underwave, then, and be happy," Eithne said.

"Live, and be very happy," he answered in his deep, gentle voice.

The tide was coming in. Eithne looked slantwise at the fisherman. She scooped up a handful of sand and let it trickle through her fingers. Now that so much was opening before her, she wanted to delay, to prolong anticipation on the very edge of bliss. But at last she got to her feet. "I . . . we . . . I am ready now. We'll come with you," she said. She began to fumble with the buttons of her dress.

He had risen too and stood facing her. "Eithne—poor Eithne—don't you understand? You have to choose. You cannot both go. There is only one skin."

She stared at him. She felt a sense

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of ruin so complete that it seemed to her the beach was heaving under her feet. Her mind was a kaleidoscope of ideas. Herbert—her duties—Corstophine—the baby's christening—discipline—the two paths. Then she held the child out to him. She knew she would never be able to do it if she delayed another moment. "Take her," she said.

"Goodby, Eithne," he said gently. "She will be happy underwave." For the second time he walked out into the sea with Eithne's child.

When the water closed over his head Eithne realized what she had done. She ran wildly out, waist-deep, shoulder-deep, pushing against the water's increasing resistance. She shrieked Una's name over and over.

There was no answer. A little wave bobbed lightly into her open mouth. Far out on the water, just at the edge of the horizon, there was a black dot that might have been a seal's head.

She ran back to the village. Sobbing, exhausted, her hair trailing over her shoulders, she told them her story. She had fallen asleep, the tide had come in, when she woke the baby had been gone. Mrs. Neville held her close and tried to comfort her.

She went on weeping.

She wept when she gave her evidence at the inquest, she wept when Herbert reviled her. (He would get a separation, he said, she was no better than a murderess, he would live no longer with a female who was so irresponsible.) She wept until her eyes were almost swollen shut with weeping.

But later, when her tear-blinded eyes met Mrs. May's wise ones, she realized that under her bitter grief there was a spark of something better. She had, after all, been brave enough to choose rightly. It was Eithne, not Una, she was weeping for.

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In this age of tranquilizers, Mrs. Emshwiller offers a short and grisly tale of the perils of tranquil optimism.

You'll Feel Better . . .

by CAROL EMSHWILLER

THE GRINDY PERCHED ON THE WINDOW sill and looked out at the rain pouring down. It cocked its head, bird-like, grinned, and then looked back at the figure stretched out like a corpse on the bed.

"Nice day," it said. "Beautiful day. It's raining, but that makes the little flowers grow. Besides, I like rain."

The shape on the bed rolled over and groaned.

"Seven o'clock," the Grindy said. "Nice time of day, seven." It half-flew, half-jumped down to the bedside table. "You'll feel better, you know, once you get up."

"Shut up." Linno pulled at his twisted tunic, and half-opened red-rimmed eyes. Something bad, something very bad had happened. He felt it in his stomach, a hard, hot, indigestible knot, the size of an apple.

He squinted at the clock. It was only seven, early for him. Yesterday he had got up at seven too. Yesterday, he thought, yesterday and something bad. Then he remembered, closed his eyes and groaned again.

"You were supposed to help," he told the Grindy.

"I am helping. Everything's going to be just fine. You'll see. It takes a little time, that's all. You mustn't be impatient."

"It's too late." Linno slid his legs over the side of the bed and sat up. "Damn fool Grindy, nobody needs you any more. Why don't you take off? It's over. It's been done."

"I'm what the Doctor ordered," the Grindy said. "I'm here to help you. You can tell me all about it, you know. I won't tell a soul. I couldn't even if I wanted to. Why don't you just relax and tell me all about it? You'll feel better."

Linno rose in an unsteady arc, his head hanging forward, his shoulders humped up, feet wide to steady him. He grunted a short syllable of a laugh. "You saw the whole thing, the whole bloody thing," he said.

He limped across the room and

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opened a cupboard door to reveal the kitchen unit, an ancient stove with food burned black on its surface, a small freezer unit under it, a deep sink to one side with dirty dishes in it.

He turned to the coffeepot, opened the lid and stared inside at the inch of coffee left in the bottom.

Then he turned the stove on under it, went back and sat on the bed.

"Lousy weather," he muttered. "Damn lousy weather."

"Oh, it's not as bad as all that," the Grindy said cheerfully and grinned.

"That's what you always say, no matter what it is. Even about that other you say, 'It's not as bad as all that.'"

"Of course it isn't so bad," the Grindy said. "Look on the brighter side as I do."

"What brighter side is that?"

"I'm sure you can find it for yourself if you try. Just try, really try, and you'll see. I don't have to tell you."

Linno got up again and went to get the boiling coffee. He poured it into a cup, sipped at it noisily, burning his lips and tongue.

Burning, burning was what he deserved, he thought. Only the Grindy deserved it too. It was the Grindy that woke him up at seven yesterday and gave him a chance to prepare and get there on time.

Of course he had told it to do it the night before. "Wake me up at seven, Grindy," he had said. "Wake me up in time to get to her when she's alone. I'll show her she can't play games with me," and the fool Grindy had done it. It had made possible just what it was supposed to help prevent.

He sipped again and then he put the half empty cup down in the sink on top of the other dirty dishes.

"How long are you going to stay around?" He went back to the bed and lay down again on his back. "Your job's over. You did just fine. Now I wish to god you'd leave me alone."

"You didn't go to see Dr. Morris yesterday. You went to see that girl instead." The Grindy flew up to the ceiling and perched there, upside down. "Dr. Morris said I would do you good for awhile, make you feel better, and that's what I'm doing. Anyway, I can't leave till Dr. Morris tells me to. You know that. Besides, am I so bad, really?"

"God." Linno shut his eyes. "You were supposed to help and all you did was flutter around and say, 'That's fine.'"

"You must remember," the Grindy said, "that most things turn out all right in the end. All you have to do is wait a bit. The rain goes away; the sun comes; that's the way life is. Things are never as bad as they seem in the dark moments. We all have our periods of self-doubt and despair. It's perfectly natural. But you must realize that you'll feel better soon."

"I did that thing yesterday. I did

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it but of course I'll feel better about it soon. Things are not so bad. They're just fine, in fact. Just fine."

"That's better." The Grindy walked down the side of the wall to the dresser and perched on the edge of it. "I'm glad to hear you say it that way. We know, you and I, that you're not a bad sort, really, and whatever you do, it's never as bad as it seems to you in these low times."

"You're talking about murder," Linno said, "and blood, blood and meat, like in a butcher shop." His eyes were slits. "I can't get it out of my mind."

The Grindy hopped down to the bedside table. "Tell me about it," it said. "It'll do you good. Why don't you just tell me *all* about it." Its voice was soothing, hypnotic.

"I didn't really want to do it." Linno's face looked blueish against the white sheets. "Or perhaps I did then, only now I don't. It's funny, that first part . . . how I killed her . . . I don't even remember. It's afterwards I can't forget, but there was no other way to get rid of the body. No other way but to cut it up into hams and hocks and shoulder roasts, wrap it up, and take it out in the basket."

"You did all right."

"What?" Linno raised himself on his elbow and stared at the Grindy. "What did you say?"

"You did fine. Of course, as you say, it was the only way. There was nothing else to do, so you did the right thing. You see that too. It was fine and everything is turning out for the best, like I said it would."

Linno sat up and leaned his face close to the Grindy. "I killed her," he said, and banged his fist down inches from the bird-like creature. The Grindy jumped to the wall above the table.

"Now don't disparage yourself," it said. "You did the right thing. You admit that. You mustn't tear yourself apart like this. Of course we all do it sometimes, it's natural, but you must remember that basically you're a nice person. Wouldn't you say that? Think about it now, sincerely, and don't be influenced by your mood."

"Nice! Damn nice!" Linno stood up and stretched a hand toward the Grindy, but it trotted higher, to the edge of the ceiling.

"I think you really ought to see Dr. Morris," it said. "I'm sure he missed you yesterday. Don't you think now would be a good time to go? He'll make you feel better about everything."

"Yes, he'll make me feel just fine . . . about *everything*." Linno stood on a chair and leaped for the Grindy and then fell to the floor on his knees. He got up, looking in each corner of the ceiling for the Grindy. "You were supposed to make me feel better *before* it happened. Why didn't you? Why? Why?"

"Shout if you want to," the Grindy said from the top of the closet door. "Get it off your chest, that's the thing to do."

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Linno sat down on the floor and leaned his back against the bed. "Get it off your chest and forget it," he muttered. "Forget the whole affair." His feet stretched limply in front of him, his hands lay palms up.

The Grindy jumped to the floor. Linno kept his eyes on a spot just in front of him.

"I've told you," the Grindy said. "All we have to do is wait a bit. The rain will stop, the mood will go, and you'll feel better. Everything's going to come out all right." The Grindy hopped closer and Linno turned his legs sideways under him.

"The little blow-off did you good, I think." The Grindy cocked its head and grinned. It stepped forward five small steps into the spot where Linno was staring.

Linno pounced then. There was a flurry of hands and wings and the *boing* of a broken spring.

"Awk," screamed the Grindy, just once.

Linno opened his hands and dropped the crushed thing on the floor, a mixture of cogs and bone, wires and blood. He picked up the tag from the leg, fallen to one side. *Ego Builder, B 12-25, Psy. dept.,* it said.

He kicked at the bird thing. Its mouth still seemed to grin.

"Everything's *not* going to be all right," he said. "Everything's *not* fine." He got his jacket and went to the door. "You made me see that, you crazy bird, but you shouldn't grin like that about it."

And he went out to the nearest police station to tell them about the girl in the basket.

Look for the July issue of

Venture

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This month's features:

JAMES E. GUNN's "Not So Great an Enemy"—a tale of love and death in a world of the future—a world where money bought eternal life, and poverty meant slow, terrible death. . . .

LESTER DEL REY's "Seat of Judgment"—once every hundred years a living goddess was born to the trolls of Sayon—a goddess almost too human . . . too desirable. . . .

TOM GODWIN's "Aces Loaded"—Bull thought the redhead was on his side against the gambling combine until he realized that her needle gun was aimed at him. . . .

Plus stories by H. Beam Piper, C. M. Kornbluth, Paul Janvier and Tom Godwin—and an exciting new book column by Theodore Sturgeon.

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Recommended Reading

by ANTHONY BOUCHER

THE ONLY MARKED "TREND" SO FAR this year is a quite unexpected one: the appearance of a surprising number of short story collections which are unclassifiable yet recognizably all in the same category.

To clarify that paradox: These are books which do not make the usual category-classifications of fantasy, science fiction, mystery, crime fiction, guignol, "straight" or "mainstream" fiction; yet the books have unity, within themselves and with each other, in the oddness of their tales—an oddness best defined by Whit and Hallie Burnett as "what happens when the night side of the mind takes over."

So far this year this department has reviewed the Burnetts' 19 TALES OF TERROR (Bantam, 35¢). Don Congdon's STORIES FOR THE DEAD OF NIGHT (Dell, 35¢) and Robert M. Coates's THE HOUR AFTER WESTERLY (Harcourt, Brace, $3.50)—and one might add, as at least closely related, Joseph Whitehill's ABLE BAKER AND OTHERS (Little, Brown-Atlantic, $3.75), though its closest approach to fantasy is a curious Kafka-like tale of not-quite-real espionage.

Now come two more disturbing revelations of the night side: Alfred Hitchcock's anthology, STORIES THEY WOULDN'T LET ME DO ON TV (Simon & Schuster, $3.95), and Charles Beaumont's first collection of his short stories, THE HUNGER AND OTHER STORIES (Putnam's, $3.50)—both books belonging about equally in a fantasy library, a crime library, or a library of straight (if off-trail) fiction.

The Hitchcock collection is almost exactly parallel in virtues and defects, with the Congdon volume—which was reviewed here last month with the suggestion that it might have been retitled MOST FREQUENTLY REPRINTED TERROR TALES. The stories are almost uniformly flawless . . . and 16 of the 25 have been previously anthologized: *Lukundoo, How Love Came to Professor Guildea, The Most Dangerous Game, Couching at the Door* . . . But the volume still deserves high marks for generosity (over 150,000 words), for the quality of its hitherto unreprinted stories, which are (particularly a wonderful Bradbury) almost on a par with the classics, and for the fact that even some of the anthologized stories are still relatively unfamiliar—especially Leonid Andreyev's *The*

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Abyss, which is the most (in the fullest sense) terrible story I have read.

Even with some first-hand knowledge of continuity acceptance (networkese for censorship), it's hard to see why some of these stories are tabu for TV. I doubt if any public medium other than the printed word could ever present such stories as the Bradbury or the Andreyev (and even the printed word may not be safe if we don't firmly resist the efforts of today's many bands of self-appointed extra-legal censors); but a vigorous dosage of at least half the stories here wouldn't do television any harm. A minor note of humor is that one of these TV-impossibles (Margaret St. Clair's admirable murder-irony, *The Perfectionist*) *has* been dramatized on TV, if very badly.

What a reviewer keeps hoping for is a collection that is both excellent and unhackneyed. The Beaumont volume is certainly not hackneyed (14 of its 17 stories are new to book form, and 7 appear not to have been published before even in magazines) but its excellence is debatable—at least to a Beaumont enthusiast of long standing. The size of the volume (80,000 words) is partly at fault here: Beaumont or his editor has included a few items weak in either concept or execution, a story here and there that needs just a little more work to be a masterpiece . . . and is exasperating in its inadequate form. But this exasperation is born only of the feeling that the first Collected Beaumont should have been sensationally impressive—and at that, it quite probably will be to those who read neither F&SF nor *Playboy* and come upon Beaumont's talents for the first time.

Technically, there are only 4 fantasies here, including 2 from these pages and one (*The Crooked Man*) which I could include in a (so far extremely slim) Hitchcock-imitation called STORIES THEY WOULDN'T LET ME DO IN F&SF. But as with all of the books in this night-side genre, the general effect, even in the "mainstream" fiction, is of an eery uncertain world of unexpected terrors and betrayals. And if the effect is not always perfectly sustained, there are enough wholly admirable stories here to make the book worth every reader's while.

Close to this new uncategorized category is the welcome reprint of Isak Dinesen's 1942 WINTER'S TALES (Dell, 35¢), part fantasy, part . . . well, simply curious, and ever brilliant and beautiful. A newer European writer of marked interest is Ilse Aichinger, whose THE BOUND MAN AND OTHER STORIES (Noonday, $2.75) reveals her as a sort of concise Kafka. The not-quite-fantasy title story is as striking a narrative use of multi-valued symbolism as I've read in a long time; and the other tales (ranging through the macabre, the supernatural and even a strange sort of s.f.) should delight sophisticated palates.

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We return to normally categorized books of short stories with James Blish's THE SEEDLING STARS (Gnome, $3), which is s.f. and THE SURVIVOR AND OTHERS by H. P. Lovecraft and August Derleth (Arkham, $3), which is *Weird Tales* horror.

The Blish book collects 5 of his stories, ranging from a short to a short novel, on "pantropy"—the interstellar dissemination of the human race by genetically adapting man to environments in which man-as-we-know-him could not survive—a concept doubtless familiar to you from *A Time to Survive* (F&SF, February, 1956) and the thrice-anthologized *Surface Tension*, both included here. There are times, particularly in the latter story, when Blish seems to pass the most remote bounds of scientific extrapolation; but for most of the book the details are worked out in magnificently convincing manner, to the point where the reader knows precisely what it is like to be an ammonia-blooded citizen of Ganymede, a monkey-like treetop-dweller on Tellura, a microscopic pond-swimmer on a planet of Tau Ceti . . . and still to be a man. It's a volume nicely illustrating the characteristic Blish balance between thinking and storytelling, with each reinforcing the other.

"Among the papers of the late H. P. Lovecraft," Derleth tells us, "were various notes and/or outlines for stories which he did not live to write. . . . These scattered notes were put together by August Derleth, whose finished stories grown from Lovecraft's suggested plots are offered here as a final collaboration, post-mortem."

In most of these 7 stories (all new to book form and 5 unpublished anywhere), I can't help feeling that H.P.L. knew very well what he was doing when he left the outlines uncompleted. Sometimes the idea is, viewed soberly, a little ludicrous; sometimes the concept has been treated more effectively in some other episode of the Canon of Cthulhu. Admirers of Solar Pons know Derleth's skill at pastiche; he does his best here, but somewhat unavailingly . . . until the last story, when, with a flash of inspiration, he introduces H.P.L. himself as a character into one of his unfinished plots and produces a warmly moving tribute of love from one writer to another which sets a perfect seal upon this post-mortem collaboration.

Fantasy collectors should note the availability of a new stock list of the publications of Arkham House, Mycroft & Moran and Stanton & Lee—all manifestations of author-editor-publisher Derleth. It's a valuable listing of a large number of key titles (Arkham was the pioneer among semi-professional specialty publishers), many of them about to go out of print; and the notes and comments on the books make the pamphlet itself a desirable addition to one's collection. Write to August Derleth, Sauk City, Wisconsin—and there may be some copies available,

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too, of AUGUST DERLETH: THIRTY YEARS OF WRITING, 1926-1956, a fascinating 30-page booklet on an all but inexhaustible subject. (And how I wish, as editor, collector and bibliographer, that all authors would prepare such booklets on themselves!)

Philip K. Dick's first novel SOLAR LOTTERY (Ace, 1955; still in print, 35¢) was a very good one—and I might take this opportunity to remind librarians that a hardcover edition, retitled WORLD OF CHANCE, is available from England (Rich & Cowan, 9 *s.*, 6 *d.*). Now, after two hasty and disappointing efforts, Dick easily tops it with his fourth book, EYE IN THE SKY (Ace, 35¢). This is so nicely calculated and adroitly revealed a work that I'd prefer to say little about its plot or even its concepts; you should read it, and its assumptions and implications should hit you unexpectedly exactly as they are planned. I hope it's enough to say that it deals with the alternate-universe theme; that I've never seen that theme handled with greater technical dexterity or given more psychological meaning; that Dick has emphatically come of age as a novelist, as well as a technician; and that this may very well be the best s.f. novel even of a year which has so far produced outstanding books by Asimov, Bester and Heinlein.

Chad Oliver's THE WINDS OF TIME (Doubleday, $2.95) would lend itself all too easily to the type of review which synopsizes the plot in order to prove the book is balderdash. Indeed, I reread the synopsis on my own file-card and find it a little hard to credit that I like the book itself as much as I do. I doubt if you'll quite believe the meeting of civilizations, across the light-years and the millennia, that Oliver depicts; I'm fairly sure you'll find the structure of the book technically imbalanced and the solution unsatisfactory—and not in the deliberate sense in which Heinlein first employed that phrase. Yet it's hard to name many more purely *readable* books in our field of late. It's warmly human (and, for that matter, warmly alien too—which is part of its point), nicely observant of our own contemporary culture—in short, Oliver, may have goofed in articulating the skeleton, but he could hardly have fleshed it more attractively.

[Only look, Chad, you just do *not*, in this day and age, end a book with:

This was not the end.

This was only the beginning.

Or am I suffering from an excess allergy to corn?]

I could probably make fun of Charles R. Long's THE INFINITE BRAIN (Avalon, $2.75) by plot-synopsis; only first I would have to understand the plot—a feat approaching impossibility on one reading. It has something to do with a world 35 light-years away which is identical to this one in geography, history, language, culture, etc. 99.9% of the time, with approximately 0.1% complete difference; and its action is

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roughly as complicated as the square (or even cube) of van Vogt. But the fast-cutting montages make for terrific tempo; suspense is unusually high (if often anticlimactic in resolution); and it's all lively entertainment, whether any of it makes sense or not.

Much the same can be said of Robert Moore Williams' DOOMSDAY EVE (Ace, 35¢), which is a story of World War III and "the new people," who hope to avert man's self-destruction by operating through "the race mind." I've never encountered more unconvincing and inconsistent mutants (if such indeed they are: the text is contradictory); but they engage in fast, vigorous action, with some of Williams' accustomed mysticism but little of his heaviness. The same double-book contains a reprint of Eric Frank Russell's effective pursuit-thriller, THREE TO CONQUER (serialized as CALL HIM DEAD).

Nicholas E. Wyckoff's THE BRAINTREE MISSION (Macmillan, $3.50) is, I'll venture to guess, the first World-of-If story ever sponsored by the Book-of-the-Month Club; and I'm curious as to how the Club's vast audience will react to its first encounter with this challenging and enchanting genre of fiction. The *If* here is a pretty one: *if*, in 1770, North had conceived and Pitt endorsed a policy of naming six liberty-loving American earls to the House of Lords, as a preliminary to arranging the representation of American boroughs in the House of Commons.

This is the well-told story of a cultivated nobleman's voyage to America to negotiate such a proposal, and his selection of John Adams as the first belted Bostonian earl; and I am wholly convinced that, in Mr. Wyckoff's words, "the results must have been almost precisely those set forth in the tale." The feeling for the truths of history is as admirable as the pastiche of Eighteenth Century prose; and if the author has obviously fallen in love-across-the-centuries with Abigail Adams, he persuades you that such a course is inevitable.

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Charles Van Doren's reign as the Heaviest-Winner-on-Any-Single-Quiz-Show was brief; but its effects may, I hope, be lasting. Other quiz heroes have been monomaniacs or prodigies; Van Doren won the affection (not the awe) of the public partly because—aside from his unquestionable personal charm and gambling spirit—he revealed himself as a genuinely cultivated man: no narrow specialist, but a curious young man whose wide-ranging intellect had touched upon the damnedest things. This ranging curiosity is (as Cyril Kornbluth points out earlier in this issue) a characteristic trait of the writing profession; and it's not surprising that Charles Van Doren is beginning to follow his family's tradition. To date he has published one short story (in McCall's*) and one book,* LINCOLN'S COMMANDO *(Harper, 1957), a biography of Commander Cushing written in collaboration with Ralph J. Roske. To this brief bibliography we now add a disturbing vision of a possible, not-too-remote future, "if this goes on. . . ."*

S R

by **CHARLES VAN DOREN**

THE MAN WALKED WITH HIS HEAD down, raising it only from time to time to check the numbers on the buildings. His coat collar was turned up; the cheap material was evidently not sufficient protection against the cold wind. He kept to the outside of the sidewalk, stepping off into the street when a party of people passed, shoving him. He did not shove back. He kept his left hand in his pocket; his right hung at his side, blue with the cold.

32, 34, 36—he turned into the large metal doorway, paused between the photoelectric cells, and entered the opening door. He muttered his name to the electronic secretary in the steel and glass lobby and passed through the turnstile, continuing down the corridor past its rows of doors. He glanced at the etched words on the frosted glass: MANAGER, SALES MANAGER, VICE-PRESIDENT. The last door on the right, the machine had said. A woman

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passed him, walking quickly. He noticed that she wore the new Water-Pruf shoes. He wondered for a moment if he might buy some, but remembered that the allowance the SRP gave him would never pay their rather high price. PERSONNEL—last door on the right. He stood while the door opened, clenching his left hand in his pocket, and entered the small office. Mr. Watson looked up, smiling.

"Sit down, sit down, Mr.—" He checked with a card on his desk. "Yes . . . hm . . . We have your letter. A good letter. Now I hope you don't mind if we ask you some further questions." The man nodded, his eyes on the floor, and Mr. Watson began to ask questions in a smooth, sure voice. From time to time the box on the desk interrupted with mechanical announcements. "And of course your papers," he ended. The man took them from the inside pocket of his coat and handed them, trembling, across the desk. Mr. Watson examined them, his eyebrows raised. "Yes . . . hm . . . Everything seems to be in order." He checked with the card once more, and looked up smiling. "We'll call you. . . . Oh yes, one thing of course, before you go—just a formality. Your hand? You'll show me your hand?"

The man did not look up from the paper-strewn desk at which he had been staring during the interview. Slowly and unwillingly he drew his left hand from his pocket and extended it, palm up, across the desk.

Tattooed on the palm were the letters S R, in green.

Mr. Watson did not seem surprised. "I thought as much. The papers—they're a bad job, you know. It's quite easy to forge papers nowadays, I'm aware of that, but it isn't that easy. Now look here, you *know* we can't hire you? You fellows . . . Why do you keep on trying? You know we always ask to see—"

"Yes," the man mumbled, continuing to stare at the desk. "I thought—It's just that I haven't had a job in four years. I need a job . . . to make a new start . . ." His voice trembled and he stopped speaking.

Mr. Watson was not angry. He leaned forward over the desk. "A new start. It isn't possible, you know. The damage is done. Anyway, I don't see why you fellows want jobs. You keep coming here, you keep coming everywhere. In a way I envy you. I mean, not having to work."

The man said nothing.

"The Project takes care of you, doesn't it?" Mr. Watson went on. He became indignant. "You should be grateful. In the Other Country they shoot fellows like you. We don't restrain you, you can go anywhere you please. We feed you, give you clothes, a place to sleep. . . . Why, you've got a lot to be thankful for!" The box on the desk announced another appointment, and the man rose wearily from his seat and walked to the door. "Now I don't

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want to see you back here," Mr. Watson said. "There won't be any sense in trying. The machine has your picture, you won't be admitted again. I'm sorry," he added, turning to the dictaphone and speaking into it. He glanced up. "You know quite well . . .." The man went out of the door.

It was beginning to be dusk in the street outside and the cold wind blew dust in a swirling cloud around him as he turned the corner. He shivered, and headed for the neon lights that announced an Auto-Snak. He sat down at the counter and ordered a cup of coffee, leaning forward to speak into the microphone in front of his place. He watched without interest while the machine collected cup and saucer, poured the black liquid, and placed his drink before him. "Ten cents," the speaker rasped, and he reached in his pocket and fingered a coin, checked to see that it was stamped with the regulation SRP across the Roosevelt, and inserted it in the slot. He glanced round him and found that he was alone at the counter, though in a booth two old men were arguing about whether the Other Country's latest note had been bellicose or not. The man rounded his shoulders and withdrew his left hand from his pocket and laid it, as though it did not belong to him, on the counter before him. Slowly he opened the fingers until the tattooed letters were visible. He moved the fingers of his right hand gently over the letters, marveling as he had done so many times that there was no tactile evidence that the stigma was there. With his lips pressed tightly together, a pale line across his face, he contracted the skin of the palm in an unsuccessful attempt to make the letters disappear in the folds of skin. He could change them to C P by bringing the little finger forward and cupping the palm slightly, but only by closing the hand entirely could he make them disappear. He replaced the hand in his pocket and, having looked around to see that no one had been watching, finished his coffee and walked out into the street.

Lights were beginning to come on everywhere as he hurried home. He walked in the street, to avoid the crowds that filled the sidewalks. A single man was likely to be an S R these days (though it wasn't always so, of course), and he did not enjoy being shoved and hearing the remarks when he passed too close to people. He well knew that everyone was not as reasonable as Mr. Watson. But Personnel Directors were often that way, of course. . . . Probably it was Government Policy. He stopped at the corner and looked down the street toward the large Project Building. There was the usual crowd of rowdies and teenagers in front of it, who would push him and yell at him as he walked up the steps and waited for the doors to open, and he thought for a moment of walking the streets all night, even in his thin clothes. But it was getting toward

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closing time and the crowd was not as large as it often was; and not as large as it would be at eight o'clock when the last stragglers would have to run a gantlet of curses and blows. He squared his shoulders and pushed through the crowd, taking the abuse without an answering word, and hurried up the stairs into his small square room. He sank down on the bed and stared at the ceiling. He continued to hold his left hand clenched into a tight fist in his pocket.

After a few minutes he got off the bed and opened the door of the small cabinet by the narrow window, took down a glass-stoppered bottle, and sat down with it at the table. The acid smoked when he withdrew the stopper, and he hesitated for a long moment before upturning the bottle and pouring a few drops of the heavy liquid into his palm. He looked at the clock on the wall. He was able to endure the pain for ninety seconds before running to the sink and washing his hand in cold water. He fell wearily on the bed, his fist tightly clenched, his face drawn in a grimace of pain. He lay without moving for some time, and then slowly opened his hand. There was no disappointment on his features when he saw that the acid had had no other effect than to redden the skin of the palm. There would be blisters this time, he thought, but the letters were still there, a brilliant mocking green.

He lay back with his eyes closed, listening to the hum of the clock and to the cries, faint at this distance, of the hecklers in front of the door below. He started violently when the loudspeaker barked at him, and after combing his hair—it was required—he trudged wearily down the corridor and up the stairs, joining the slowly moving, silent throng that converged on the dining room.

The meal was soon over, and he returned to his room, stopping to collect the day's SRP-stamped nickel, dime and quarter from the machine by the dining room door. He lay on the bed again, his eyes fixed on the white ceiling, listening without interest to the faint sounds his stomach made in its digestive processes.

By ten o'clock he could hear no more activity anywhere in the building. It was the night, he decided. He would do it tonight. He prepared everything carefully. He took from the cabinet the large hatchet he had bought two weeks before. He had saved his allowance to purchase it (everything metal was expensive nowadays). He lit matches under the blade until the steel was smoked an even gray-blue. It required some time to adjust the tourniquet around his arm: he used a handkerchief, and pointed a pencil through the cloth in order to adjust the tension. When he was ready he sat down at the table, the hatchet in his lap, and looked at his hand. The green letters stared up at him. He dropped his head for a moment. If there was anything to wait for, he

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would wait. But there was nothing . . . nothing. He raised his head and pursed his lips, and lifted the hatchet. It did not required a severe blow.

The pain was at first slight and then terrible. He was fascinated by the amount of blood. For a while he forgot to tighten the tourniquet. When he did so the blood slowed but did not cease. He began to be afraid, and pulled wildly at the handkerchief. The blood would not stop. He stumbled to the bed, his hand over the wound, and before fainting jerked at the emergency cord on the wall. He heard voices at the door and then nothing.

He awoke in the hospital; from his bed he could see the words over the door: SECURITY RISK PROJECT, and under them AMPUTATION WARD. A nurse was tending another patient three beds away, and the man lay quietly, his eyes staring at the white ceiling. His hand throbbed under the covers, and he moved his right hand to touch the bandage. He was surprised at the shortness of his arm, and then remembered what he had done. He felt no horror at the act, only a mixture of disgust and relief. The nurse in her white gown came up to him and adjusted the pillows, smiling sourly. But she was gentle when she turned him over and washed his back, and then checked the bandage. "Don't pick at it," she warned. You'll start it bleeding again. We don't want any more trouble out of you."

"Was I trouble?" he muttered.

"Of course, it's always trouble," she said, moving to the next bed. "You fellows . . ." He turned on his side, away from her. He did not want to be trouble to anyone. The bed on this side was empty, and he stared at it for a long time, going to sleep and waking again when his hand throbbed. The nurse brought him a meal and told him he would be up the next day. "We haven't got the room," she complained. "You fellows, you think we've got nothing else to do." But she was careful of his hand, and told him before turning out the lights (she left one bulb burning by the door) to ring if he needed a sedative.

It was in the faint light of this one bulb that he discovered (reaching behind him to press the buzzer because he could not, after all, sleep through the pain) the green letters on his right palm. S R, they said. There was no change. He lay back sweating. With difficulty he restrained his desire to cry out at her when she came, softly on her rubber soles, with the pill and the glass of water. After several hours he managed to sleep.

The interview with the doctor was at three in the afternoon, and the nurse helped him to dress. "You can do it fine with one hand," she said cheerfully. "Don't worry, it's hard at first." He had trouble with the buttons on his shirt, and she had to zip his fly while he faintly blushed. "Now don't be afraid," she said,

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when she felt him tremble, "Doctor won't bite you. It might be different if you were the first. But he wants to talk to you, to try to make it easier. You'll find it's much better to cooperate." She smiled the sour smile again, and he left her, shifting his arm in its sling. He wondered how long he would feel the pain.

The doctor was signing papers, and without looking up motioned him to a seat. The man sat down wearily, his left arm resting on his lap, his right hand clenched in a fist in his pocket. The doctor finished. "Well!" he said. "We'd hoped, with you . . . You waited four years. We'd hoped that some sort of adjustment . . ." He stopped. "In a way, I suppose—Well, you know, it's understandable. We understand it, you know. It's a terrible punishment. But then it's a terrible crime! And this way we don't have to hate you and fear you. The hecklers outside, they don't understand very well, but then such people often don't understand. Yes. What was your crime, by the way? What did *you* do?" He looked up curiously. "I don't have your record here."

"I—"

"That's all right, you don't have to say. I know it's sometimes hard. But would you prefer death? In the Other Country, you know, they shoot them, immediately. I think we have the better way. And, you know, it's important how the others, how we feel. As I say, we don't have to hate you. You're not martyrs, you can't be made martyrs of. Oh, I'm not accusing you!" He lit a cigarette from the lighter on his desk. "It's a difficult question though. I've thought a good deal about it. I suppose you have, too. You were a . . . what was it? A lawyer? A professor? Something professional, I seem to remember."

"Yes. I—"

"Quite. I understand. I imagine it's not pleasant to think back to those days. We don't want to make the punishment any harder than it is—and of course the Government directive . . ." He drew deeply on the cigarette. "You should thank God for that Government directive. Ten years ago, you know, you weren't allowed outside the buildings."

The man continued to stare at the floor, flexing the fingers of his hand in his pocket. He was surprised as always to discover that the tattoo marks could not be felt by his fingers as they moved across his palm.

The doctor went on. "Now we hope this won't happen again. We've tried to find some rehabilitation method, but without very much success, I'm afraid, so far. We've got good men working on it. As I said, in your case we'd hoped that it wouldn't be necessary. But now . . . well, you've got only one hand now, and you'll have to find some way of adjusting to that. Of course all the men here have only one hand—" He stopped when he noticed the puzzled expression on the man's face. "The nurse didn't tell you that you'd

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been transferred? But of course you were, while you slept. But as I was saying, we can offer you an artificial hand. Some of them won't go to the trouble of learning to use it. I suppose they think there's not much point in it, since they can't work, you know. I hope you'll have a different attitude. In any case you don't have to decide now, it'll be some time before the . . . stump is strong enough." He coughed quietly. "Now is there anything you'd like to know?" He smiled faintly. "I'm here to answer any questions you might have." He waited, the cigarette burning between his fingers.

"I—" the man began. "What is . . . the next . . . ?" He did not look up.

"The next? How do you mean?"

"The next—after the hand . . . ?"

"Oh, of course, quite. Now I said I hoped that wouldn't be necessary."

"Yes."

"Well, of course, I might as well tell you. Why, it's the forehead. The forehead."

"But . . . I've seen . . . I haven't seen anyone with—the letters there. There are many of them, I haven't seen anyone with the letters on the forehead."

"No." The doctor stubbed the cigarette out in the automatic ashtray, which whirred and then turned up clean again. They can't bear it. They can't bear that."

"You mean, they . . . ?"

"They what?"

"You mean they cut . . . that . . . ?"

"Yes, quite. Of course. Now if you'll excuse me?" The doctor shuffled through the papers on his desk. He looked up quickly. "I've got a lot of work to do," he said, brusquely. "I'm sorry. I think it would be better if you didn't go out for a few days. Of course we're not restraining you, you can go out if you wish. But I know it's painful." He delved into the papers once more, picked up a pen, and began signing them.

The man rose slowly to his feet and moved toward the door. "You mean . . . ?" He licked his lips. "They cut . . . that . . . ?" The doctor nodded without looking up. The man glanced at him as he passed through the door. The doctor had lit another cigarette, and the smoke curled up around his bowed head, filling the room with a faint blue haze, as he scribbled across the bottom of the papers. He must not have one of the new Micro-Smuthe pens, for the point made an unpleasant scratching sound as it moved across the paper.

THE HORROR STORY SHORTER BY ONE LETTER THAN THE SHORTEST HORROR STORY EVER WRITTEN

The last man on Earth sat alone in a room. There was a lock on the door.

RON SMITH

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One treasures the reliable writers who are always at their characteristic best; but one particularly cherishes the surprising ones who have no fixed characteristics, the wondrous unclassifiables who never write the same kind of story twice, the Avram Davidsons, the Mildred Clingermans, the Andrew Garves, the Enid Bagnolds . . . and, it would appear, the Mary-Carter Robertses. Miss Roberts has recently published an extraordinary novel, LITTLE BROTHER FATE *(Farrar, Straus & Cudahy, 1957), which is a sort of montage of three of the greatest murder cases of the 1920's (and of all time): Snyder-Gray, Loeb-Leopold and Hall-Mills—an uncompromisingly realistic and analytical book, in which no one could possibly recognize the author of the following fantasy. This is imaginative literature of a kind and quality which I have not encountered since the death of Stephen Vincent Benét: historical American folklore illuminated by warm sympathy, enlivened by vivid storytelling and memorable prose; and I hope you'll agree that Jack Smith's is the most powerful encounter with the Devil since Dan'l Webster's.*

When Jack Smith Fought Old Satan

by MARY-CARTER ROBERTS

THIS STORY WAS TOLD ME BY A MINISTER, a venerable man of nationwide repute. He heard it from the country people among whom he had spent his youth. They heard it from their forebears, who had repeated it, parent to child, throughout the century that stretched between the happening itself (in 1769) and my clerical friend's birth. Many mouths thus narrated the tale, and all belonged to godly folk. Obviously, the tale is true.

The event took place on that scrap of land that makes a false nose, as it were, off the southeast corner of Pennsylvania, a dwindling protuberance with its northern half between Delaware Bay and Chesapeake and its southern between Chesapeake and the Atlantic Ocean. This territory is composed of one state—Delaware—

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and parts of two others—Maryland and Virginia—but with the parts so cut off by water from the states' main bodies as to have no geographical relationship. In recent years, indeed, people have taken to giving the nose a name of its own, bestowing a territorial identity on it. They call it "Delmarva." That would not have been safe in 1769, for then geography was kept in its place, if you understand what I mean. It was properly turned back at state lines. A Virginian in those days would not be taken dead for a Marylander or Delawarean, a Marylander for a Delawarean or Virginian, or a Delawarean for anybody but himself. Delawareans, of the three populations, were undoubtedly the most exclusive. They still are. My story happened in Delaware.

There was this young man, Jack Smith, and there was the chapel in Bascom's Woods, and to the country people round about it was perfectly apparent that something was wrong with both. But everyone was used to the wrongness of Jack Smith, so the greater concern was felt for the chapel. That structure should have been the local joy and pride. It was new; it had been built by the church members themselves; it was the first sacred edifice in those parts; the people had done the best they could to make it beautiful as well as sturdy; they had bought a very fine-toned bell to hang in its little steeple—and they had never been able to use the building at all. This was enough to cause any pious congregation plenty of distress—while as for Jack Smith, he had always been the way he was and occasioned no general worry. One person alone cared what happened to him.

Jack Smith was the kind of fellow ordinary folk would like to laugh at—if they dared. His wrongness was about practically everything ordinary folk take for granted. He was against all respected institutions. Nothing on earth could induce him to touch his forelock to his betters; he did not admit he *had* any betters, though he was just a poor freeholder who tilled his few acres with his own hands.

And it was not enough for him to refrain from the gesture of deference. He would march by the local baronet with his hat, which he usually wore at a sideling angle, squarely on top of his head, to make his attitude clear. He did not like any gentry, if it came to that. He called them Pet Cats and said they all lived by licking boots bigger than their own, composing in this way a social system in which he, Jack Smith, would take no part. And since all respectable people respected, above all things, religion in some form, Jack Smith was against religion in *all* forms. He named himself an infidel. Most of the time he was quiet, being busy on his land, but he carried these wrongheaded ideas very close to his surface, kept them right under his skin, as it were, and, with two grogs in him to set him off, he would vo-

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ciferate. People generally took the view that he was ridiculous.

This notwithstanding, there was just a single reason—no more—why Jack Smith could be despised in his own neighborhood with safety: he was a minority of one. His mockers knew instinctively that they needed to be in numbers. Jack Smith had a dash about him that spelled danger. It kept him from being comfortably contemptible.

He was twenty when these events happened, a strongly built bucko, black as night as to hair and eye, swarthy of skin, comely of feature but always scowling, as if he dared anyone to say he approved of anything. We would call him adolescent today. In 1769, however, adolescence had not gotten recognized. Fifteen was a man then, and Jack Smith had pushed his maturity still further along by going to the wars, or such wars as there were. He had fought Indians on the frontier and in Canada and had journeyed as far west as the mysterious Ohio River. He had seen more of the world than anyone in his county and he uninhibitedly expressed scorn for the stick-in-the-bogs that were his neighbors. Yet it was not strange that he had returned. He was a Delawarean, and return is a Delaware custom.

People had gathered around him when he came back, but not to learn where he had been or what he might have seen. They just wanted to know if he had changed any. When they found he had not, but was as wrong-headed as ever, they were pleased, and then and there began nettling him in groups when there was a chance for it.

These chances occurred mostly at the Bear's Claw Tavern, for that was where he went oftenest. The other drinkers soon had a program laid out to use on him. They would wait until he was muddled and then overwhelm him with their witticisms, speaking one after another too fast for him to answer. He would finally explode, curse until it was frightful, and slam out. Then they would all laugh, feeling very sure that never, under any circumstances, would *they* be so absurd.

The one person who cared what happened to him was always present at these shouting matches, but was prevented by sex and condition of servitude from taking any part. It was the bound girl who worked as the tavern barmaid. This young person had been left on the township an orphan pauper at the age of six, and authorities had bound her out to Horeb Potter, the tavern proprietor, who had signed articles making him responsible for her protection, care and Christian education. That meant he had put her to work. From daylight to dark for the past ten years she had drudged on the Potter property, doing everything. But nobody thought then that such a life was a hardship; so, not knowing she had reason to be sorry for herself, Oma had space in her to be sorry for others. She was sorry for Jack Smith.

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In her eyes he was handsome and brave, and certainly superior to his tormentors. When she saw him overcome by their numbers, she would be filled with grieving pity. She was a tender-hearted thing, anyway. She mothered the graceless Potter brats and the chicks in the Potter barnyard, and, until recently, such kind occupations had absorbed all her natural emotions. Up to the time she saw Jack Smith, she had never given a thought to men, except to wonder occasionally how it was that, in an evening of drinking, a dozen of them could talk so much and say nothing anyone could remember. Now she would have liked nothing better than to sit in utter silence while Jack Smith told her the tale of his adventures, but she hardly formulated this dream, for dreams were outside her experience. More practically, she longed for something to turn him from his dangerous, wicked ways, which, she was passionately sure, were no true part of him.

She was a good girl behind the bar. She had a light foot, a strong wrist, a pretty bosom, and fine, silky, golden hair. Nobody gave her a look, however—she had no portion, and she lacked the forward-coming manners that some wenches might have used to get notice for themselves; being modest, seldom lifting her eyes, never her voice. She was pious, too. She had not been taught to read, but she kept her dead mother's little Bible reverently wrapped in a clean kerchief, and every night before she lay down in the haymow where she was sent to sleep, she said her prayers. Always she prayed for Jack Smith.

He was barely aware of her. When he entered the Bear's Claw, he would come swelling with anger at his former defeats and thinking only of his adversaries and how, this evening, he would triumph over them. Sometimes, sensibly, he would tell himself that the best thing to do would be just to ignore the gnats, have his drink and go. But that never happened. The drink would unlock his speech and soon one familiar thing would lead to another.

That was how matters stood when knowledge of the wrongness at the chapel took hold on people's minds and spread first amazement, then terror, over the countryside.

It started at the very opening service. The circuit rider was there, to dedicate the new House of God, and everyone was eager and excited. They all came in a throng to the Woods and waited until the Reverend arrived, carrying the shining key, his good face shining too. He unlocked the door. Then he, and all the others, as fast as they could crowd up and look in, stopped in unbelieving shock. Everything in the beautiful little church had been flung into the most shameful disorder.

The benches were turned over, the Communion table too, if such a thing can be credited, and the pulpit

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chairs. The hymnals were strewn along the aisles. Only the lectern, on which lay the Bible, had been left untouched, but right beside it was the strangest, most sinister evidence of sacrilegious venom in the place: the carpet, which had been carefully cut to fit the lectern's foot and then nailed smoothly down, had been ripped up and flung back all around, the tacks still in it. It was as if someone had come so far, meaning to defile the Book itself, and then had been afraid and had turned a baffled rage on the floor. But all the windows were found to be securely locked, just as the door had been. There was no explanation of the crime whatever.

The circuit rider, a doughty warrior for the faith, was used to frontier rowdyism. He rallied fast. Straight in he went, calling for the other men to help him, and, blasting out a strong fighting psalm as he worked, began to put things to rights. Soon the chapel was once again in order. But of course grief and horror filled all the people's hearts where there had been happiness and pride. By then they were thinking the harm had been done by some debased ruffian who had managed to get a false key. That thought passed through all their minds, that and the hot promise they made themselves to find out who the scoundrel was and see that he got at least a hundred lashes well laid on, at the next assize. With this vague and miserable theory replacing their joy, they took their seats. They had the dedication service, but, if it had been a funeral, it could not have been less like the radiant time they had expected.

They had planned, as a climax, when the church was finally and fully consecrated, to have the bell peal out. In this way the building itself, with its own voice, would say to God that it belonged to Him, while the givers of the gift sat under the immaculate roof, listening. To make this ritual perfect, the leaders had decided against any preliminary ringing. They had had reports from the foundry of the beauty and mellowness of the bell's tone, and while hanging the instrument, they had tapped the metal and had been delighted with the musical resonance. But not yet had the bell been rung.

Now the moment approached, and a ghost, as it were, of the earlier anticipation crept back into the saddened group. They saw Brother More, who had been chosen ringer for the first term, rise and tiptoe out, and after that they sat keyed up, waiting. It seemed that the voice of the church, when it sounded, would sweep the ugly beginning away. But the voice did not sound. Brother More came back in, and this time he was not tiptoeing. He was walking fast and looking very queer. He advanced halfway down the aisle, stopped, lifted his right hand as if he were taking an oath, and addressed the minister. "Brother," he said, "the bell won't ring."

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That was too much. The Reverend came down from the pulpit, coattails flapping, and every man, woman and child stood up. He strode headlong toward the door. Everybody, as he passed, fell in behind him. They all crowded around the doors on either side, craning necks, rolling eyes, staring up into the steeple. They could see the rope hanging in its proper place, swaying as a result of Brother More's efforts. He was telling the preacher that he had felt the bell swing, all right, but that no sound had followed the swinging. Everyone thought the ruffians had either muffled the tongue or stolen it away.

The preacher said, "A ladder." They brought one that they had used in getting the bell hung. They put it in place and he started up. As he was an old man, some of the younger members offered to make the climb in his place, but he went on, fast and spry. When he came down, he too looked queer. The tongue had not been removed or muffled, he said. It was there, he had taken it in his hand and struck it against the bell's side. And no sound whatever had resulted. When the people heard this, they lost heart in utter bewilderment. The men hung their heads, some of the women sobbed, and the children began to shriek and howl.

The Reverend did what he could to comfort the distracted flock. He said he had heard somewhere that there were such things as sick bells, strange as it seemed. He suggested that they send a message to the foundry, asking that a bell doctor be dispatched to them right away. In the meantime, he reminded them, they had a church, whereas up to then they had had none. They must not weaken because of evildoers. Let them have the lock changed and then, if the mischief went on, let them set a watch.

Those were the things he said, his air that of common sense and good cheer. But he was far from feeling that the words covered the truth of the matter. He had a powerful premonition that something worse than bell sickness or mischief-making was involved here, and he longed to stay with the beleaguered congregation and guide it through the danger, whatever it might be. But four hundred miles of rigidly made appointments lay before him and he could not linger, even for a day. So he rode off, promising himself that he would make the chapel in Bascom's Woods the first object of his prayers.

The people followed his advice. They had the lock changed and the smith who did the job was a chapel member. He saw to it that nobody got a glimpse of his work until the lock was in the door. As for the key, he made just one and for it he fashioned an iron case with a lock of its own, so that only the member to whom the sextonship was entrusted ever set eyes on the precious object. And still the mischief continued.

There was never again such a complete hurly-burly as on the open-

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ing day, but the insults were not the less striking for being slighter. The people would come in and find a pulpit chair upended on the Communion table. Or the collection baskets would be filled with rocks. Or the cup of the Holy Sacrament would be standing by the common drinking-water bucket.

As these atrocities made it plain that someone had entry to the church, even though entry was impossible, the members took the preacher's other direction and set a watch. Four farmers with muskets stood guard each night for a week. All was tranquil and, when the next meeting day came, nothing was found disturbed. The congregation felt better. Some progress, at least, was being made. Then, right in the middle of the prayer, there was a terrible crash and a window burst in. Burst *in*—that is to say, all the broken glass fell *inside* the room. But no missile was found to explain the breaking—no rock, no chunk, nothing. That window had just exploded. The people were really frightened then.

They made no effort to remain in possession. It was the Devil, they said. And terror spread over the land. Old Satan lived in Bascom's Woods. You did not have to be an ignorant or superstitious person to believe it. Educated people had practically *seen* it. The grove was avoided even in daylight, and soon other stories about it began to circulate.

Someone remembered an old report of how, about a century earlier, a passing schoolteacher had asked Sir Thomas Bascom, the holder of the original patent, to let him have some part of the Woods for a free school for poor children. But Sir Thomas had not considered that the poor deserved educating and had been additionally affronted by the notion that they should have anything free, and so had profanely refused. When the suitor had had the impertinence to inquire what better purpose the land might serve, the nobleman had roared, "I'll let the Devil have it first!" and had ordered his footmen to give the upstart a thrashing.

Now it appeared that the baronet's misuse of the Devil's name had marked one of those patiently recurring occasions in human annals when the Devil himself had been eavesdropping. He had obviously taken Sir Thomas up on his impulsive promise. He had accepted the gift of Bascom's Woods. That, anyway, was what people said. And, dubious as it seemed from some points of view, there was this frightful thing about it—it fit the facts and no other explanation did.

These events tickled the infidel Jack Smith immensely. He told himself the godly had been caught in their own reasoning at last, and were they anything but the poltroons their mothers had unfortunately borne, they would at least admit it. But no—not they. They were like a

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man standing on a plank that is balanced over a crossbar—if they took a step in one direction, their footing would fly up and smite them, because of God. If they moved the other way, it would do the same thing, because of the Devil. And nothing could make them say they were not on eternal ground, even while their teeth chattered as they spoke.

Jack Smith saw clearly that it was the alleged personal irruption of the Devil into Delaware that had put the issue in so favorable a light from the viewpoint of an infidel. As long as the godly could settle every philosophical question in terms of their own gab, there was not much a real thinker could bring before them. They buried it all under saws about faith and the Scriptures. But they could not bury Old Horny! He had already shown them that. One snort of sulphur from Horny's nose, and every one of them was on the run, whimpering as he went. What a spectacle!

Eating his bachelor supper in his snug little farmhouse kitchen, Jack Smith chuckled over this out loud. It was the funnier to him because, himself, he did not believe in the Devil—either. The Devil was part of church religion, and, as he could not accept the church God, neither could he the church Adversary. The chapel people, as he saw it, had gotten trapped in their very first need to put their dogma to the proof. And at last, he, Jack Smith, could triumph.

He slapped on his old hat at a desperate pitch and started for the Bear's Claw, and for the first part of his walk he kept himself warm and happy inside by reviewing the scathing things he was going to say when he arrived. Then he came to the branch road that led off toward Bascom's Woods. At the sight of that, he felt his thoughts change. Just who was it, he wondered, that was doing the damage out there, anyway?

He did not doubt that the reports were true. Too many people vouched for them. So—who *was* responsible? Maybe, thought Jack Smith, the really masterly thing for him to do would be to catch the criminal and refute all this Devil possession nonsense by appearing with the fellow—a human being, of course—in person, taken in the act. What a stroke! How would the pious look then? Jack Smith strongly inclined to the idea for a minute. He stood still, squinting narrow-eyed down the road, where already the grass was growing, since nobody now would put foot on the surface, and considered the depredations. He had decided some time earlier that they were committed by someone who came down the chimney. But who?

He ran over the list of low county characters, as he had it in his mind—gamblers, wenchers, sots, petty thieves, runaways—and then shook his head. None of those men was low in a way that would make him

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do anything with a fixed purpose. None of them was antireligious either; on that subject they were fulsomely conformist. Maybe some smart bound man, thought Jack Smith, articled to a penny-worshiping chapel member and getting even the only way he could. Maybe. And what would happen to the fellow if Jack Smith collared him and dragged him in? Well, he might be burned in the hand with a red-hot iron. Might be put in the pillory—if he was lucky. Might be flogged to a pulp. Might have his ears cropped. Any of those things could happen to him. He might be hanged. Sacrilege was serious. Jack Smith walked on toward the Bear's Claw.

His mood was altered, though. His happy malice had left him for a somber anger. He still felt able to refute the psalm singers, but now that the time, at long last, had come, he could not feel the enemy worth the effort. He entered the tavern, walked to the bar and laid down his money for a grog. Not more than eight seconds passed while he was doing this, but everyone in the parlor became aware of him. Always it was that way with Jack Smith. It was his dash. He turned other human beings into a crowd—and suffered accordingly.

The crowd that evening was all men. To be sure, there was one female in the room, but she could not be thought of as a woman, or even as completely human, since she was just the bound girl, Oma, washing glasses behind the bar. When she observed Jack Smith coming in, she felt her heart give a great hard beat. When she noticed that he was morose and scowling, she felt the same organ melt with grief that he should ever be other than perfectly happy. No one she had seen in her life had been perfectly happy, but perfect happiness was what she wanted for Jack Smith, and perfect happiness for herself would have lain in bringing perfect happiness to him. She loved him.

He, for once, gave her a little attention, though not for her own sake. Taking that strange truth in—that he no longer needed to struggle with the others, that he felt completely detached from them—he found himself, in that room with its long association of struggle, queerly lonely, almost forlorn. So when he saw Oma's kind little face turned toward him from the far end of the bar, he waved at her, just from emptiness. "Ah there, sweeting," he said, "You make a poor old man's eyes feel better."

Oma's skin, at that, went from milk-white to a glowing, glorious red, while her eyes changed from still gentleness to the most dazzling sparkle. But Jack Smith did not see these lovely happenings, because at that second Horeb Potter stepped between him and the girl. Horeb, having heard the rallying speech, decided that the guest was in an expansive, or spending, mood and acted to help things along. He did

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what was for him almost unheard of. He stood treat. He set a second glass down beside Jack Smith's first, and said, "Do me the honor."

Surprised but courteous, Jack Smith answered, "Your good health," and tossed the liquor off. His new detachment ended then and there.

He listened to the other men talking. They were discussing the chapel mystery, of course—nobody in the county those days discussed anything else—and, unlike Jack Smith earlier in the evening, they were not interested in *who*—they knew who. They were suggesting methods by which the congregation might get the building free.

Cut down the trees, said the squire. Make the whole tract open ground. The Devil wouldn't—couldn't—lurk there without cover.

Hold a great meeting, rejoined the schoolmaster. Have a month, six weeks, of unbroken gospel feast. Services twenty-four hours a day, great bonfires all night. If necessary, let the brethren put up tents in the grove and live there. Crowd the Devil out.

"No, no," exclaimed a sharp, eager, breaking-sticks sort of voice then. It was the notary. He was a little, mean, cowardly man who took great pains to be correct in everything he did and equal pains to find other people guilty of mistakes. He had a rat-type face and just now his light blue eyes were strangely gleaming. "Not by cutting trees or holding meetings will we drive the Devil from our midst!" he proclaimed. "He does not hide in trees, he does not fear the godly—the few godly of this sinful township. His strength is in the hearts of the sinners, and we have many, many of those. Let us drive the sinners forth, and we will soon see Satan follow."

The squire said, politely but a trifle crustily, "Sinners? If you mean we are lax in enforcing our laws, sir, you are mistaken. We have very few unpunished crimes."

"True, true!" cried the notary. "But *how* do we punish those crimes? With patience, with long-suffering, with mercy. The other day I heard of a bound girl in Bethel township who had been robbing her good mistress, taking the keys while her lady napped, opening the cupboard and helping herself to sugar. What was her punishment? Six lashes. She should have had three dozen! That is what I mean, gentlemen. So merciful are we, the wicked creep to our county from all over the colony, and in every wicked heart the Devil finds a shelter. So now he too has come."

The high fast speech and the blazing eyes had their magnetism. The others exchanged looks questioningly. Maybe he was right, they thought. *Something* was amiss. They had seen the disordered church. They had pulled the bell rope and gotten only silence.

"What do you think we should do?" asked a freeholder.

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"Revive our good old laws!" cried the notary, his voice going still higher. "Burn! Brand! Crop ears! Cut off hands! And whip! Whip, whip, whip! Make the Devil-shelterers suffer!"

"That ain't the way I fight," said Jack Smith.

His voice, ordinary in pitch and disgusted in tone, swept the notary's magnetic moment quite away. Once more Jack Smith was the chief man present. Once more the others were a crowd. And the notary, from a peak of leadership, felt reduced to the crowd's least significant member, so that in his heart he bled, though outwardly he looked as bloodless as a little rock. The schoolmaster said affably, "We wouldn't expect *you* to fight the being we are talking of, Master Smith, I assure you."

"I don't care what you expect," said Jack Smith.

"To an infidel, his presence is probably welcome," continued the schoolmaster, and now a faint note of hysteria edged *his* voice, although he usually had good control of himself.

Jack Smith answered, "To *this* infidel, his presence hasn't even been visible. I don't belong to your chapel. So I don't care. But here's what I just heard you people saying. There's a hundred and fifty men that do belong, and there's one old Devil. And the only way you men can figure to lick that Devil is to beat a poor bound girl that ate some sugar. My remark was—I don't fight that way. You can take it or leave it. I don't care."

It is unnecessary to give in full the charges and countercharges that were then hurled back and forth across the Bear's Claw parlor. Suffice it to report two points—first, Jack Smith made it perfectly clear that he did not believe in the Devil, thereby shocking his hearers far more than when he had denied believing in God; and second, the notary, fairly screeching, invited Jack Smith to walk through Bascom's Woods that very night, and Jack Smith accepted.

He not only accepted. He put a little flourish on it. He said, "I'll walk through the Woods, though it ain't on my way home. If I see Old Satan, and he's civil to me, I'll be civil too. But if he interferes with me, I'll fight him. He won't see me turn and run, like a chapel lad."

He got that far in his speech and saw young Oma's eyes fixed on him—her wonderful, new, blazing, big blue eyes, frankly adoring. Well, he thought. And went on to his flourish.

"I'll fight him any way he likes," he announced. "The fancy. Rassle. Rough-and-tumble, bite and gouge. Canuck. Injun. Any style." And, as he listed the items of his prowess, he gave a demonstration with each one.

Saying "The fancy," he whirled his fists through a sequence of jabs and punches that had the distinction, at least, of being very fast.

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Saying "Rassle," he hooked an elbow under an imaginary adversary's chin and pressed back until the watchers fairly heard the bones crack. Saying "Rough-and-tumble, bite and gouge," he removed another adversary's eyeballs with a graphic sweep of his thumbs and bared his hard, white, handsome teeth in some ferocious grimaces.

At "Canuck," he simply gave a kick; it was too fast for the spectators to make anything of it. But at "Injun," he performed his masterpiece. For then he took on a strange, wild, mysterious expression, bent over forward from his hips until he was the shape of a right angle, bounded into the air and after that circled the parlor three or four times, seeming just to float, for when he put a foot down he did so without making a particle of sound or even vibration. It was a passage from the Huron war dance, and, as its climax, called for a war whoop, which Jack Smith faithfully supplied.

Then he laughed with the utmost gaiety, hurled on his old hat, opened the door and went out. The second he was standing on the step alone, he stopped, gathered himself and took a standing broad jump that shot him halfway across the road. He thought he had not felt so good in a long time, but he did not associate this goodness with anyone's beautiful eyes. He had forgotten the bound girl and was delightfully absorbed in himself.

She, behind the bar, was praying for him with all the terror of her loving heart. He was going into Bascom's Woods! "O God, help him!" she whispered, while she washed glass after glass. And then she remembered the wicked, unreligious things he had said, and wondered in new fear if God *could* forgive such speech. God, as she had had Him described to her, was distinctly a Lord of Vengeance. Where any mercy entered into her concept of the Divine make-up, it was by her own involuntary amendment—involuntary because she could not long imagine anything without some kindness in it. Now she hopefully laid hold of the idea that the Omnipotent might be propitiated by a scapegoat and hastened to offer one. "Punish me in his place," she implored. "Punish me—but help him, please, oh, please!" Jack Smith had said he did not fight that way. . . .

He marched rapidly along and turned into the road to the Woods without a worry. He genuinely did not believe the Devil existed. He had no fear of anything supernatural. However, when he rounded the bend that let him see the Woods's front—a mile-long stretch of unbroken heavy timber—he thought that, since it was a dark night, he might better be wearing his pistol. He could run into human interference, if not diabolical. But who would try to rob him? He was known to be a poor man who never

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had anything but a few shillings for his drink. He went on. He entered the Woods. Then he was reminded, out of his frontier experience, of what forest darkness could be. No moon, no stars and a thick canopy of heavy-leafed branches overhead. See the Devil in there—the Devil, who was reputed to be black? See black —*against* black? Jack Smith grinned. He might pass within two feet of Old Satan and never know Satan was there.

He was wrong about that. He saw Old Satan when he had penetrated the Woods about half a mile, and what he saw was precisely a silhouette. Old Satan showed up—*black*—against his black surroundings. He really did. The reason was—Old Satan was so much *blacker.*

He was sitting on the ground beside the path, facing toward Jack Smith. Jack Smith saw his horns curving up on the sides of his head, saw his long pointed ears, saw a pair of high shoulders and what seemed to be the sides of a pretty long torso, and that was all he could make out. He had an impression, however, that Old Satan had his knees lifted and was clasping them with his arms. It was Jack Smith's woodsman's eye that took all this in, an eye that worked far faster than human thought. So Jack Smith had seen the Devil, had recognized him and catalogued his points before the awful conclusion arrived—Old Satan was real! There he was!

Jack Smith stood still. He had been an orphan since he could remember and in consequence was used to feeling himself alone—alone and deprived of something all other people had. This accustomedness was a good thing for him now, for in that moment he felt alone indeed. Alone, alone, alone. Old Satan was real? Then he, Jack Smith, had been wrong in everything that had seemed right to him. It was a great deal to take in without warning. He went on standing still.

Old Satan spoke first. He said, "Jack Smith." His voice was light, a little wooden and not in the least terrifying.

Jack Smith replied, "My name."

"I hear you want to fight," Satan continued, without making a move.

"Well, then, come on and fight," Jack Smith replied, himself unmoving.

Something switched across the path in front of his feet, something like a big and very fast snake. It made several heavy wriggles, straightened out and was still. It was the Devil's tail. Jack Smith knew this without understanding how.

"Step over it," invited Old Satan.

"Horns," said Jack Smith, "and a long tail too. You damned old cow."

He took a very short step forward and aimed a hard kick. With all the blackness, he miscalculated, and that was lucky for him, for, had he landed his foot as he intended, he would have broken every foot bone he had. He grazed the tail as it was, and the mere touch was enough to

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tell him that, despite its limberness a few seconds before, it was now like a bar of iron.

"You fight hind-part-to?" Jack Smith inquired.

He then saw a change in Old Satan's silhouetted head. At the tip of each horn there appeared a very, very short pointed flame. These were pale green. The next thing Jack Smith knew, the Devil was up and charging.

The green flames were racing toward him, and they were at about the level of his belly. Evidently Old Satan was meaning to gore him. His herd bull had meant to do that same thing two weeks earlier, when it caught him in close quarters in the feed lot. Jack Smith acted now as he had acted then. He made no attempt to dodge, but threw his whole weight forward against the oncoming Devil, grabbing the horns, shoving down and then twisting hard. He doubted Satan's neck was stronger than the bull's, and he knew that even a neck of great power is not much good if yanked out of line.

His calculations seemed to be right. He soon had Satan looking over his own shoulder, while Satan's feet scrabbled hard to keep planted, the sound reminding Jack Smith that those feet were hoofs. A few yanks more, he thought, and bones should crack. It seemed too easy, and it was. Jack Smith was next aware that something was funny about his arms.

They were numb. They were heavy. They were almost like dead —what on earth? Then Jack Smith realized—his hands, wrists and forearms were terribly *cold*. He could not feel a thing with them; he was keeping his grip just by bringing his weight down, but the weight traveled along his arms as if they were sticks. The reason was that the little flames in the tips of Satan's horns were licking Jack Smith's flesh and spreading this frozen torpor.

In the nick of time Jack Smith let go, forcing his fingers to loosen by sheer will power. Then he sprang aside, anticipating another charge, but Old Satan stopped to rub and feel his neck. He straightened up and Jack Smith saw he was about seven feet tall, a foot taller than he was himself.

Jack Smith spoke. "Put 'em out," he said, and waggled his fingers over his own brow, to indicate that it was the horns he was referring to.

Satan answered, "Why don't you do that?"

"I will," said Jack Smith. And spat. Once, twice. The green flames disappeared.

And Satan, it seemed, could bear this peculiarly abominable insult no better than a man, for he made an angry noise, a sound like that of a teakettle boiling over on a hot stove, and then came on in a rush. This time he did not undertake to gore, but minced up, dancing and prancing, his fists lifted, his chin in, his shoulders weaving and bobbing,

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all in the smartest style of the fancy.

Now although earlier that evening Jack Smith had given so flashy an exhibition of his skill in box fighting, he really had no wish to engage in any such bout, for the truth was he knew little of the method. Also, he believed that, in meeting any attack, it was healthy to introduce an element of surprise. So he met Old Satan's scientific pugilism with a wild, savage trick right out of the American woods, the vicious French-Canadian lash, the kick that kills. It is delivered without warning; it travels like lightning, or anyway faster than human sight can go; it is aimed at the victim's chin; and, ideally, it breaks both jaw and neck. Ideally also, of course, it is performed by a foot cased in the French-Canadian logger's spiked and cleated boot. Jack Smith was wearing no such gear—only a Delaware farmer's shoe, lightly armed with a toe of copper.

But he did have the speed and muscle. He kicked his demonic enemy as if he were a demon himself. He flashed his leg up as if there had been no such thing as gravitation. His foot traveled like a weight on the end of a rope that is swinging *down,* gaining speed and force, not losing it, longing for the climax of its arc when it should crash against its target. It was a magnificent lash.

One thing, however, went against its success. That was the pitch darkness. (The Canucks seldom lashed in the dark themselves; barrooms and torch-lighted camps were their sites for this kind of battle; in the dark they simply stabbed.) So Jack Smith failed of his target, though not by a complete miss. His shoe scraped Old Satan's cheek and tore one of his long ears. It brought blood. Jack Smith could see that—pale-green blood, the color of those flames, seeped out of one side of Satan's head and ran onto his shoulder. It did not shine in the dark, but it was brightly visible. It painted the ragged edge of the ear that had been torn—no thicker than a membrane—against the air behind it.

Old Satan did not resume his fancy fighting. He took a new attitude, out of which Jack Smith could at first make nothing. Slightly, just slightly, Satan bent his body and every one of his limbs, spreading the limbs abroad, holding his elbows out from his sides, taking a wide-planted stance on his hoofs. Then he pulled in his neck, so that his head seemed to be right on his shoulders, sticking a little forward. In this position he looked like just one thing, and Jack Smith recognized that thing for what it was, at last.

Ever since he had first glimpsed Satan sitting there beside the path, he had been wild in one quarter of his mind because there was nothing for him to liken his adversary to. Old Satan was not like a man, despite having human speech, erect posture, hands and the general outline of a man's body. He was not like a field beast—horns, hoofs, ears

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and tail notwithstanding. But those were the only creatures that he could reasonably be compared to, since they were the only ones whose properties he shared. Now Jack Smith saw the real likeness of him and that turned him sick, for it was the one member of the animal kingdom that Jack Smith simply could not abide—not in sight, in thought, or in memory—the spider. Hunching there in the midst of his curved limbs, Old Satan was spiderlike and nothing else. Jack Smith even had an idea that Satan was not standing on his hoofs at all, but was hanging from a thread of web. And Jack Smith's stomach went clear over.

In this horrible second, Old Satan addressed him with a sentence of austere rebuke. He said, "You do not fight fair."

Spinning through Jack Smith's already spinning mind went the answer he might make: "I don't take it out of the backs of bound men and girls, either." For at that second, at the sight of his lifelong, inborn dread and hate—the insect murderer—so magnified, so black against pure blackness, Jack Smith felt *all* his hates come together. And Old Satan, hanging there, was not just a spider in his eyes but was smugness and hypocrites, and aristocracy and cowards; and no-justice-for-the-poor; and the agonies of branding iron, pillory and gibbet; and the tears of all the hopeless people—and of little orphan boys too. The whole sum of the bitter emotions that had kept Jack Smith from ever being a petter of Pet Cats, and had made him Jack Smith, infidel, blazed up in him, directed against the dangler opposite.

And if, previously, he had been accepting his battle with Old Satan as a fight between, at least, two male beings, he no longer did. He could not conceive that Old Satan had even the single warm attribute of sex. Sex was the means by which men changed, giving life to new men, sons to come after them—and Satan did not change. He was always the same and he had always been there—the same—for every man who had drawn breath. The Old One. Jack Smith did not try to put any of this clot of concepts into lucid words. He just roared, "And serve you right!" and gathered himself for what might come next.

Then Satan leaped. Still keeping his spread-out posture, he sailed through the black air that was between him and Jack Smith. He landed hard, chest to chest, and they went down, Jack Smith of course being underneath. Satan at once enwrapped him, using arms, legs and tail as well.

Then it was rough-and-tumble, nothing else. They kneed, clawed, ground, choked and hammered. Jack Smith did not remain underneath, but neither could he remain on top. He and Satan rolled, thrashing over a wide expanse. Sometimes they spun fast, each contriving to defeat the other's tactic as soon as it was applied. Sometimes they lay,

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seemingly still, for moments, measuring each other's strength, each gathering his own resources. This went on a long time, and all of that time the two were in a close embrace, body against body, sometimes face against face. Jack Smith in this manner got an intimate comprehension of what Old Satan's physical being was.

Spiderlike, indeed. Old Satan was neither warm, as a man would be, nor cold, as a fish or lizard. He was just a trifle coldish—and utterly dry. And he was a prober and sucker in every particle of him. He was completely covered, Jack Smith found out, with very, very short thick fur, and each hair of this coat had a life of its own—which was to probe and suck. Wherever a surface of Old Satan came in contact with a bare surface of Jack Smith, the satanic surface took hold. Each separate hair on it wriggled to investigate Jack Smith's skin and, having satisfied itself that way, went to work, fastening its tip down, sucking. So that Jack Smith, as well as his mighty battle with the spider that was seven feet high, had also these thousands of infinitesimal, eager indecencies to madden him. Ghastly as they were, they helped him, in a way. They kept him from sinking into routine, either physical or mental. They gave him the spur of horror. He fought like one inspired, inventing and applying new tricks without being aware of it, driven to brilliance by desperation. Just to get away from the feel of Satan—that was the whole of his state of mind in this passage of the fight.

And yet, frantic as he was, he forbore to use one well-proved, effective trick, forbore again and again, for he had repeated chances. That was the bite. He would, in need, have taken a beast-devil's ear or even tail in his teeth. He would have taken a man-devil's hand or sinew. But the hairy, temperatureless anatomy of a spider! Jack Smith fought this part of his fight with his jaws clenched and his lips pressed together too.

However, if the bite was omitted from consideration, not so was the gouge. Jack Smith presently fixed his mind on gouging as the best method of getting free, could he but attain the necessary position. The gouge, very simply, consisted in removing an opponent's eyes. It was quick, requiring only a few seconds to achieve its purpose. It was economical of effort, for it called for no strength. It might kill an adversary or it might not, but that was unimportant. It *would* end a fight.

At long last Jack Smith got his opportunity. He found himself on top with his forearms free and above his head. The position could change in a second—Old Satan was trying, with both his arms, to heave Jack Smith off his chest, while with his thick, coldish tail he was tearing at Jack Smith's leg hold, sometimes latching on and pulling, as if the tail had been a cable, sometimes

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flailing, as if with a whip. So Jack Smith acted fast. He felt over Satan's face to the spots where the eyes should be (up to then he had seen no light come from Satan's countenance, nothing except the pale-green fire and blood) and, finding the eyes in the normal places, though covered with furry lids, he instantly set his thumbs.

The technique then was to push down, driving the eyeballs back in the skull a certain distance. After which, the thumbs should be bent at the first joint and the direction of the push changed—from down to outward. By this very simple sequence of motions, if all went well, the eyes would be scooped forth. It was an old method of human combat, descending from the Neanderthalers by way of the Greeks, Romans and European mercenary armies to the American frontier, where it had been well established for a century. Jack Smith was perfectly familiar with it. He proceeded correctly. He drove his thumbs down, Satan's furry eyelids being under them.

What happened next was that Jack Smith's thumbs went on an unexpected distance. For Satan's eyes did not wait to be pushed in; they withdrew, as it were, before the pushers, retired of their own accord, and left Jack Smith's thumbs sticking down in Old Satan's skull in seeming vacancy. For a few seconds. Then Jack Smith realized what was happening. His thumbs were freezing and the cold was crawling up his wrists and forearms. It was the same cold as had struck him from the flames in the horns, and it acted the same way, of course. It was so terrible that it numbed without warning. Jack Smith's hands were half paralyzed before he even felt a chill. He jerked his thumbs out with a yell and, in the whole horror that he felt, he let go of Old Satan completely and sprang to his feet and rushed back three or four yards.

Old Satan in no way interfered with this. He sat up himself, taking the easy attitude in which he had been resting when Jack Smith first saw him. For a second, no more, he allowed Jack Smith to see his eyes—two pale-green slits—as if to inform him that they were uninjured. Then he patted the ground in front of him with the end of his tail, giving a gentle thump. That was all he did.

And Jack Smith, standing still and breathing loud, feeling the life creep, with an agony as of death, back into his hands, but also feeling, on every particle of his exposed skin, the loathsome memory of the hairy violations, vivid and crawling and vital—Jack Smith, at this point, decided to finish this fight Injun. Injun style was clean. There was no hugging and rubbing in it. There was no contact at all, up to the last moment. So the Injun fight would be his method from now on. He was a master Injun fighter.

There had been one whole summer in the north woods when he

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had fooled some bands of Huron trackers who, themselves, were reliably reported to fool the Devil daily. So it would take a smart Injun to fool Jack Smith—a smarter one than had yet lived to brag of it—and a smart devil too. Having laid this plan, Jack Smith vanished.

He had been standing by a tree and he became part of the tree trunk. How? You could not say he stepped. He glided, maybe. Or drifted. Or dissolved and floated, if you choose.

Best to say, Jack Smith just was gone. He had been in one place, and then he was not in that place, nor had he moved to any other, so far as a watching eye could see. Such was the essence of the Injun stalk.

Jack Smith loved this way of fighting. As soon as he decided to use it, he underwent that wonderful change that he had had earlier in the Bear's Claw Tavern—he ceased to be a Delaware farmer; he became the free, gleeful, savage child that was bred of the American wilderness. He was an Injun.

That meant he was the trees, the undergrowth, the air. He *was* Bascom's Woods as well as was *in* it, for he drew it all into himself, calling on the sub- and supersensory faculties that men in breeches never know they have.

This was the way to fight! For this was the primitive essence of the fight—fight and hunt combined—and the sublimation, since it was fight on a mental plane, mind against mind, no other force involved. Well, that did not leave *him* much to fear, Jack Smith thought, grinning. Old Satan was no Injun fighter. Jack Smith, after he blended into that tree, never had Old Satan out of his sight (though he never came in line of Satan's vision either) and he could easily perceive that Satan knew not the first thing about the stalk. Old Satan showed a really pitiable ignorance.

He first cocked his horned head at the tree into which Jack Smith seemed to have entered, telling himself, practically out loud, that, as Jack Smith *must* have gone behind the tree, he would have to come *out* from behind it sooner or later. When this did not happen, Old Satan got up and walked around. He did not leave the comparatively clear space in which they had done the rough-and-tumble, and it was apparent to the watching Jack Smith that he was uneasy, for twice he whirled suddenly around, fists lifted, evidently expecting Jack Smith to be creeping up behind. Finally he sat down again, but remained edgy; Jack Smith could tell that by his tail, which switched back and forth in nervous short arcs. Jack Smith, in the meantime, was never more than fifty feet away. His plan was to get Old Satan completely baffled, but not give him time to conclude that his opponent had run off, and then come in and cut Old Satan's throat.

His weapon for the blow was not much. It was a little clasp knife that he carried in his pocket. It had a

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single blade and that was no more than two inches long. It was razor-sharp, however, and two inches, if applied accurately and fast, would be enough to split the big vein that was in any neck that was a neck at all, human or devilish. Jack Smith, gliding through the pitch darkness and seeming to be part of it, felt calmly sure of himself. He prolonged the stalk about ten minutes and then closed in.

He came across the little clear space that was between him and Old Satan, as silent as a cloud. He got up to Satan's back. The tail, switching its little arcs, was laid on the ground to Satan's right. That was a good thing. Jack Smith aimed to strike on the left—the vein was there. He struck. He drove his blade in its full length, stabbing Satan's neck just about under the left ear and then dragging hard toward the front. The vein parted. Jack Smith knew this because at once the pale-green blood spurted up, looking like the jet of a fat fountain; but Jack Smith could not stop. So violent was his hatred, he dragged on and achieved a half decapitation. Then Old Satan's head clunked down on his chest and Jack Smith quit cutting because he had to. He took his fingers from the knife handle, leaving the blade in the gash, and started to rise up to expel the great "Ah-h-h!" of victory. The "Ah-h-h" did not follow.

Instantly, before he got his back straight, he was thrown into a frenzy by Old Satan's blood. It had drenched his hand, wrist and sleeve, and now he felt it act precisely as the hair had acted. It seemed to separate into an infinity of particles, each of which had the hairs' hideous investigative propensity and the revolting sucking mouth. Instead of the "Ah-h-h," Jack Smith expelled a shout of disgust and rage. He flung off his coat, he ripped out his shirt sleeve, he grabbed a great handful of leaves and scrubbed at his skin until at last he felt clean again. Not until he had done all this did he pay the slightest attention to Old Satan.

Then he saw that Old Satan was clear down, prostrate. He was lying on his back. The blood, spurting from his neck, had made a puddle all around his head and shoulders. Against the pale green, Jack Smith could plainly see the hairy, horrible and sinewy formation of his late enemy. He could also see the handle of his little knife, still stuck in Satan's neck. He stood still and sighed.

Then Old Satan spoke. In a tired, bored, very faraway voice, he said, "You cannot kill me, Jack Smith, for you are just a man. I am Evil-in-the-World, and no man can destroy me. I have played out this nonsense of a fight with you to teach you that. I have let you use all your tricks, and have let you seem to win. So that you would learn that you cannot win. A blade in my throat?" Old Satan languidly lifted his tail toward his head and let a loop slide

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over the handle of Jack Smith's weapon. The tail then plucked the knife from the wound, carried it to Old Satan's left chest and drove the steel in there. After which the tail seemed to collapse. It simply flopped back on the ground. Old Satan went on, exhaustedly talking.

"In my throat, in my heart, in me anywhere, a human weapon is impotent. Jack Smith, I tell you again: a man cannot fight the Devil. But once in a while, once in a great, great while, far too infrequently for my needs and purposes, there is a man who can *be* a devil. A man who can rise so high. You are such a one. You can be one of my helpers and friends. With me, you can throw confusion into human hypocrisy. You already hate it. You have already cut yourself off from it. Now, with me, you can confound it. Come on."

Jack Smith thought how those words fit into every story he had ever been told about Old Satan. Old Satan tempted people. He made them great promises and then dragged them off to Hell. Anybody knew that. But why, Jack Smith asked himself, did Satan, trying now to win a recruit, put on so poor a showing? Why lie there, weltering in his blood, talking in a beyond-the-grave voice, while telling Jack Smith what a great future he could offer him? If, as he said, he *really* was unscathed? Why? Jack Smith squinted hard at the flat, sunken form before him. The green blood still flowed—what a lot the creature had. Were the jets slowing a little now? Jack Smith tried to believe they were. And Old Satan, making it clear that he read Jack Smith's mind, thought for thought, gave a demonstration.

Out of his chest there rose another Old Satan, just like himself, except that he was uninjured and full of vigor. And behind this second Satan came a third, and a fourth and fifth, and so on, until a throng of them filled the clear space full. Everywhere Jack Smith looked he saw horned heads, high shoulders, long bodies, pointed ears. None of these new Devils did anything. They just stood. For perhaps a minute they stood, while the green blood spurted from the Devil on the ground. After which, as they had arrived, so they departed. One at a time they sank down into the first.

"I am Evil-in-the-World, and no man can destroy me, Jack Smith," said Old Satan again. "Come on."

Jack Smith knew then exactly what he had to do—and he did it. He spun on his heel and walked straight away from the thing before him, walked straight indeed, walked hard and fast, for he was filled with consummate purpose. Right in his path stood an oak, the biggest oak in Bascom's Woods, one that was named the Five Hundred Year Tree, because people said it must be so old. Jack Smith did not swerve as he approached it. He did not slow down, either. He walked plumb

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into the monster trunk and shoved his breastbone against it and spread-eagled his arms, which, at their full extent, did not cover a fifth of the tree's circumference.

And so standing, Jack Smith bellowed out, in a voice that rang through Bascom's Woods from one end to the other, the very prayer of all human prayers, the basic, desperate petition that lies in every simple heart when it has seen the determination and elaborateness of evil. *"O God,"* he roared, *"HELP me!"* And then he planted his feet with all his might, did as much as he could with his arms to grasp that great wall of bark, and heaved. The tree came up.

Jack Smith felt its profound center root move first. That gave, then rocked and swayed. The vast root mat that was above it then relinquished the unstirring mold in which it had lain for half a millennium, and finally out sprang the long root arms that stretched along the surface, waving and flying like pennons of victory. And to the sound of a thunder too vast to be imagined, Jack Smith found himself standing with the Five Hundred Year Tree resting on his shoulder.

It was an awkward thing to hold, and he had to act fast to keep it in balance. He did. He passed the trunk rapidly along from hand to hand until he grasped it about thirty feet short of the top. Then he swung the whole tree back, over his shoulder, as if he were using an ax, and then forward, and then down. With all the fire in his heart he made his aim, and with the same fire he expressed it. "Get!" he screamed. He hit. The awful weight of the central mat came down exactly where he sent it—smack—on the bleeding spider. And then Jack Smith was there alone, the tree trunk in his hands, himself the center of a cataclysmic commotion.

Nothing visible was moving, but through the length and breadth of Bascom's Woods, and of the whole township and county, and probably of all Delaware, if it comes to that, the sound waves were leaping and pitching and soaring like the surface of the sea at the height of a hurricane. The crash of the oak had been simply indescribable. It was so big that Jack Smith could not hear it; he became aware of it only when, finally, it ended and there was quiet once more. And then, so stunned, so numbed was he, he might not have apprehended silence itself, except that *this* silence had a very peculiar little noise moving through it. It was like the singing of a bullet, beginning loudish but rapidly rushing away, yet, from both its direction and a certain thickness in its tone, making plain that the object producing it was traveling not through air but earth, straight down. And Jack Smith understood what the object was. It was Old Satan, heading home—Old Satan diving for Hell so fast he made the rocks hum with his passage. Fainter and fainter grew

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the note, dwindled to a last, slim, V-shaped g-l-o-o-c-k, and stopped. After that, into Bascom's Woods the real quiet came.

Jack Smith let the trunk slide out of his hands. It sank gently to the ground. He followed its motion. His knees began to bend and went on bending until they brought the full length of his shins to the earth. He did not stop at that. He kept on sinking until he was sitting on his heels. All the time his eyes stayed fixed on the vast hole made by the uprooting.

At last Jack Smith spoke. "You *did*," he said.

More quiet followed, a period of the kind that can never be measured on a clock. Then, sensibly, pleasantly and cheerily, the little chapel bell began to ring. Jack Smith knew no human hands were pulling on the rope. He looked toward the sky and, very, very humbly, he touched his forelock. And the sun came up.

Oma and Jack Smith were married soon after that night. Theirs was the first wedding in the chapel. The good people of the township (for of course there were good people there, as Jack Smith himself could see when he looked at what was before his eyes instead of what was stored in his mind) made up a purse for them, in gratitude. He at first refused the gift, as contrary to his independence. But Oma, the bride, plucked his sleeve and whispered, and he accepted. They used the money to buy freedom for the bound girl who had sampled her mistress' sugar.

Jack Smith and Oma had a long happy life together. For seven years, to be sure, they were separated; that was when he went to fight in General Washington's War, the conflict that ensued when Delaware decided to expel the British Empire—and did. Despite the interruption, however, the pair contrived to have a good many children. You will find Smiths all over the United States today, fine citizens too—but, if descended from farmer-soldier Jack and bound girl Oma, making nothing of it. For *those* Smiths are from Delaware and Delawareans are, as I said at the beginning of this story, exclusive people.

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You are probably reading this just after the Memorial Day weekend. And it's only about a month till the Fourth of July. And underneath all of your pleasure in these national celebrations, there may be a certain haunting doubt, a question that keeps nagging at you. . . .

The Holiday Man

by RICHARD MATHESON

"YOU'LL BE LATE," SHE SAID.

He leaned back tiredly in his chair.

"I know," he answered.

They were in the kitchen having breakfast. David hadn't eaten much. Mostly, he'd drunk black coffee and stared at the tablecloth. There were thin lines running through it that looked like intersecting highways.

"Well?" she said.

He shivered and took his eyes from the tablecloth.

"Yes," he said. "All right."

He kept sitting there.

"David," she said.

"I know, I know," he said. "I'll be late." He wasn't angry. There was no anger left in him.

"You certainly will," she said, buttering her toast. She spread on thick raspberry jam, then bit off a piece and chewed it cracklingly.

David got up and walked across the kitchen. At the door he stopped and turned. He stared at the back of her head.

"Why couldn't I?" he asked again.

"Because you can't," she said. "That's all."

"But *why?"*

"Because they need you," she said. "Because they pay you well and you couldn't do anything else. Isn't it obvious?"

"They could find someone else."

"Oh, stop it," she said. "You know they couldn't."

He closed his hands into fists. "Why should I be the one?" he asked.

She didn't answer. She sat eating her toast.

"Jean?"

"There's nothing more to say," she said, chewing. She turned around. "Now, will you go?" she said. "You shouldn't be late today."

David felt a chill in his flesh.

"No," he said, "not today."

He walked out of the kitchen and went upstairs. There, he brushed his teeth, polished his shoes and put on a tie. Before eight he was down

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again. He went into the kitchen.

"Goodby," he said.

She tilted up her cheek for him and he kissed it. "'By, dear," she said. "Have a—" She stopped abruptly.

"—nice day?" he finished for her. "Thank you." He turned away. "I'll have a lovely day."

Long ago he had stopped driving a car. Mornings he walked to the railroad station. He didn't even like to ride with someone else or take a bus.

At the station he stood outside on the platform waiting for the train. He had no newspaper. He never bought them anymore.

"Mornin', Garrett."

He turned and saw Henry Coulter who also worked in the city. Coulter patted him on the back.

"Good morning," David said.

"How's it goin'?" Coulter asked.

"Fine. Thank you."

"Good. Lookin' forward to the Fourth?"

David swallowed. "Well . . ." he began.

"Myself, I'm takin' the family to the woods," said Coulter. "No lousy fireworks for us. Pilin' into the old bus and headin' out till the fireworks are over."

"Driving," said David.

"Yes, *sir*," said Coulter. "Far as we can."

It began by itself. No, he thought; *not now*. He forced it back into its darkness.

"—tising business," Coulter finished.

"What?" he asked.

"Said I trust things are goin' well in the advertising business."

David cleared his throat.

"Oh, yes," he said. "Fine." He always forgot about the lie he'd told Coulter.

When the train arrived he sat in the No Smoking car knowing that Coulter always smoked a cigar en route. He didn't want to sit with Coulter. Not now.

All the way to the city he sat looking out the window. Mostly he watched road and highway traffic; but once, while the train rattled over a bridge, he stared down at the mirror-like surface of a lake. Once he put his head back and looked up at the sun.

He was actually to the elevator when he stopped.

"Up?" said the man in the maroon uniform. He looked at David steadily. "Up?" he said. Then he closed the rolling doors.

David stood motionless. People began to cluster around him. In a moment, he turned and shouldered by them, pushing through the revolving door. As he came out, the oven heat of July surrounded him. He moved along the sidewalk like a man asleep. On the next block he entered a bar.

Inside, it was cold and dim. There were no customers. Not even the bartender was visible. David sank

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down in the shadow of a booth and took his hat off. He leaned his head back and closed his eyes.

He couldn't do it. He simply could not go up to his office. No matter what Jean said, no matter what anyone said. He clasped his hands on the table edge and squeezed them until the fingers were pressed dry of blood. He just *wouldn't.*

"Help you?" asked a voice.

David opened his eyes. The bartender was standing by the booth looking down at him.

"Yes, uh . . . beer," he said. He hated beer but he knew he had to buy something for the privilege of sitting in the chilly silence undisturbed. He wouldn't drink it.

The bartender brought the beer and David paid for it. Then, when the bartender had gone, he began to turn the glass slowly on the table top. While he was doing this it began again. With a gasp, he pushed it away. *No!*—he told it; savagely.

In a while he got up and left the bar. It was past ten. That didn't matter, of course. They knew he was always late. They knew he always tried to break away from it and never could.

His office was at the back of the suite, a small soundproof cubicle furnished only with a rug, a couch and a small desk on which lay pencils and white paper. It was all he needed. Once he'd had a secretary but he hadn't liked the idea of her sitting outside the door and listening to him scream.

No one saw him enter. He let himself in from the hall through a private door. Inside, he relocked the door, then took off his suit coat and laid it across the desk. It was stuffy in the office so he walked across the floor and pulled up the window.

Far below, the city moved. He stood watching it. How many of them? he thought.

Sighing heavily, he turned. Well, he was here. There was no point in hesitating any longer. He was committed now. The best thing was to get it over and clear out.

He drew the blinds, walked over to the couch and lay down. He fussed a little with the pillow, then stretched once and was still. Almost immediately, he felt his limbs going numb.

It began.

He did not stop it now. It trickled on his brain like melted ice. It rushed like winter wind. It spun like blizzard vapor. It leaped and ran and billowed and exploded and his mind was filled with it. He grew rigid and began to gasp, his chest twitching with breath, the beating of his heart a violent stagger. His hands drew in like white talons, clutching and scratching at the couch. He shivered and groaned and writhed. Finally, he screamed. He screamed for a very long while.

When it was done, he lay limp and motionless on the couch, his eyes like balls of frozen glass. When

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he could, he raised his arm and looked at his wrist watch. It was almost two.

He struggled to his feet. His bones felt sheathed with lead but he managed to stumble to his desk.

There he wrote on a sheet of paper and, when he was finished, slumped across the desk and fell into exhausted sleep.

Later, he woke up and took the sheet of paper to his superior who, looking it over, nodded.

"Four hundred eighty-six, huh?" the superior said. "You're sure of that?"

"I'm sure," said David, quietly. "I watched every one." He didn't mention that Coulter and his family were among them.

"All right," said his superior, "Let's see now. Four hundred fifty-two from traffic accidents, eighteen from drowning, seven from sunstroke, three from fireworks, six from miscellaneous causes."

Such as a little girl being burned to death, David thought. Such as a baby boy eating ant poison. Such as a woman being electrocuted; a man dying of snake bite.

"Well," his superior said, "let's make it—oh, four hundred and fifty. It's always impressive when more people die than we predict."

"Of course," David said.

The item was on the front page of all the newspapers that afternoon. While David was riding home the man in front of him turned to his neighbor and said, "What I'd like to know is—*how can they tell?*"

David got up and went back on the platform at the end of the car. Until he got off, he stood there listening to the train wheels and thinking about Labor Day.

★ ★ ★

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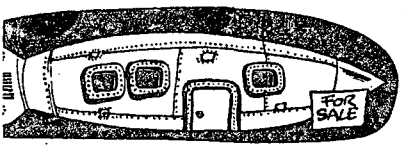

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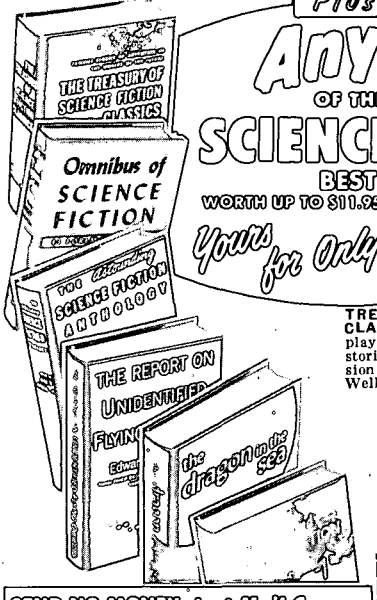
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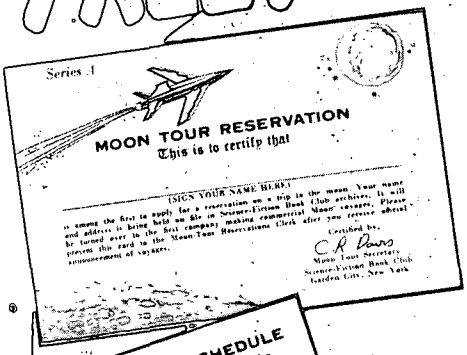
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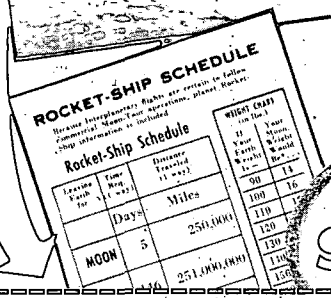

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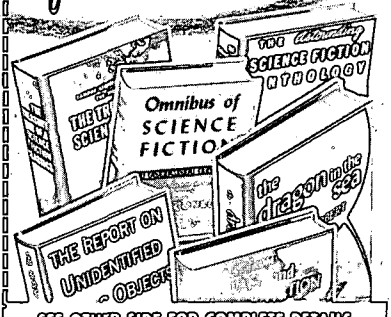

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